

WAINSWORTH'S

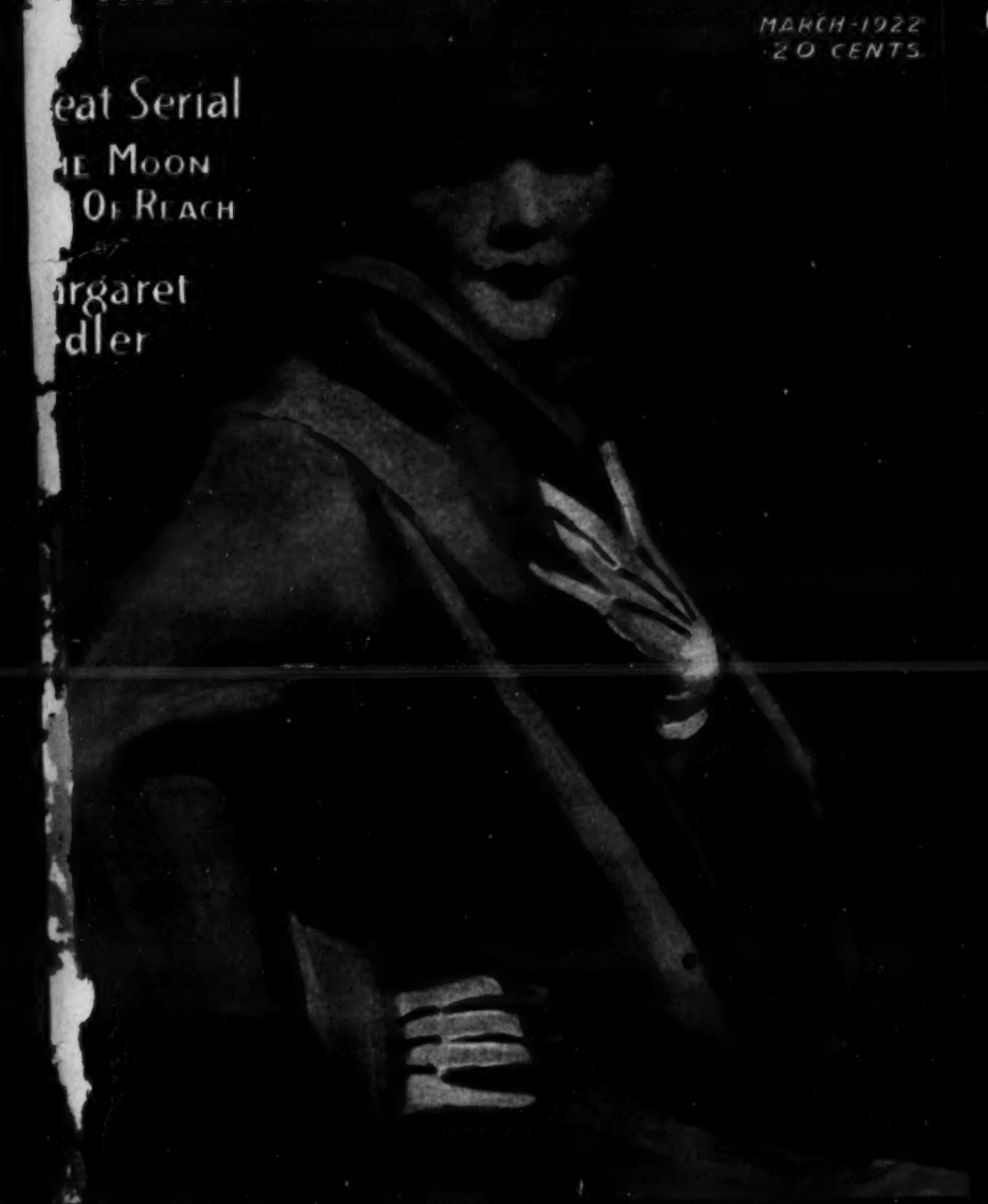
THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

MARCH-1922
20 CENTS

Great Serial

THE MOON
OF REACH

Margaret
Edler





Let \$12⁰⁰ to \$30⁰⁰ a Day

Be Your Goal

Let **ELECTRICITY**

Be Your Route

LET ME BE YOUR GUIDE

A Big-Pay Job is Waiting for You

Don't wish any longer, BE a success!

I'll show you how!

Be An

"Electrical Expert"

You want to get ahead—money—Electricity is the field for you! It is the big pay profession of today; but you must be trained; you must know Electricity from every angle to hold down a big-pay job—the job that pays.

If you are ready, I am. You don't have to know the first thing about Electricity right now. I will train you in a few short months so that you can step right into that big pay business—the job you have always wanted.

"Electrical Experts" are in big demand—more jobs than men to fill them. It doesn't make any difference what you are doing, or what you have been doing, if you want to succeed—if you want big pay—I'll show you how because I know I can teach you Electricity. Opportunities in Electricity, great as they are today, are nothing as compared to what they will be tomorrow. Get ready for tomorrow! Get started now! Get in on the ground floor—ahead of the other fellow—jump from a "bossed" into a "bossing" job—jump from \$3 to \$5 a day to \$12 or \$30 a day. I know you can succeed, once you're a "Cooke-trained man."

Earn \$12 to \$30 a Day

Compare your present salary with these big pay figures. How does your pay envelope "stack up" with that of the trained "Electrical Expert?" Is his pay twice, three or four times as much as you now earn? Don't envy him, don't just wish for pay like his—go after it yourself! You can get it because

THE ROAD

TO SUCCESS

I Will Show You How

Yes sir—right in your own home in your spare time I will make you a Certificated "Electrical Expert"—a "Cooke-trained man." As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works I know exactly the kind of training you need and I will give you that training. My system is simple, thorough, complete—no big words, no useless theory, no higher mathematics, just compact common sense written in plain English.

FREE Electrical Outfit

To make your success still more certain I give you free a splendid outfit of tools, materials and supplies—you do practical work right from the start and pick up extra money doing spare-time work.

I Guarantee Satisfaction

There's no chance for failure with me. I train you RIGHT and furthermore I agree, if you're not entirely satisfied, to return every penny you have paid me. No other school will do this for you.

L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer,
Chicago Engineering Works, Dept. 433
2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir: Send me at once your Big Free Book, "How to Become an Electrical Expert," and full particulars of your Free Outfit and Home Study Course—all fully prepaid, without obligation on my part.

Name _____

Address _____

Mail This Coupon Today

Save \$45.50 by Enrolling Now

If you will send this coupon today, I'll show you how to save \$45.50. Write today for full particulars—also my big FREE book, "How to Become an Electrical Expert." It's the first step towards that big pay job of yours.

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CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS**

Dept. 433

2150 Lawrence Avenue

THE "COOKE" TRAINED MAN IS THE "BIG-PAY MAN"

This Letter Saved Me Half on a New Typewriter

Chicago, Nov. 2, 1921.

Dear Henry:

I hear that you are down in New York to open a branch office for your firm. You'll be buying a lot of things for the office, not the least important of which will be typewriters.

And that's what I want to talk to you about—typewriters. I want to give you the benefit of an experience I had some time ago, and thereby, I hope, save you some real money.

About a year ago I decided to buy a typewriter for home use. My first thought was to purchase one of the makes we were using in the office, which had been put in before I became buyer for the house. But when it came to digging up a hundred dollars for the machine—I just couldn't. Somehow or other it looked like too much money to me.

Then I thought about picking up a second-hand machine, but the price was about as high, and I had no assurance of service.

I was undecided as to what to do, when one evening at home I ran across an Oliver Typewriter ad in a magazine. I remembered then having read the advertising before and being impressed with the story.

"Why pay \$100 for Any Typewriter?"—"When You Can Buy a New Oliver for \$49.50?" read the ad—then it went on to explain how The Oliver Typewriter Company had cut the price by selling direct and eliminating costly selling methods. It was clear to me as an experienced buyer how they could well afford to lop off \$50.50 of the \$100 by their new economical selling plan.

The ad brought out the fact, too, that I could pay \$49.50 cash, or \$55 in easy installments—\$3 after trial and then \$4 per month.

But the thing that decided me was their free trial offer. Without my sending or depositing a penny, they would ship me an Oliver for five days free trial. I could use the typewriter for five days just as if it were my own, and if I wasn't satisfied, all I had to do was to ship it back at the Oliver Company's expense. Well, I mailed in the coupon and got an Oliver for free trial. To make a short story shorter, I was more than pleased with the Oliver. I fully agreed with The Oliver Typewriter Company that if any typewriter was worth \$100 it was this splendid Oliver.

Well, later when we found it necessary to replace some of the typewriters at the office, you may be sure I put in Olivers, saving the company a nice \$50.50 on each. At first the girls were reluctant about changing machines, but after a week or two with the Oliver, they wouldn't have any other.

Naturally now we are all Oliver enthusiasts

—that's why I write this letter to you.

You just give the Oliver a trial and you'll be more than willing to buy me a good dinner when I arrive in New York next month.

Yours, J. B.

**FREE
TRIAL**



**Now
\$49.50**

That is the letter that saved me \$50.50 on each of my typewriters. I not only equipped the office with the Oliver, but, like my friend, I also bought one for home use. Yes, I am more than willing to buy my friend a good dinner for his valuable advice.

Any reader may order an Oliver direct from this ad by mailing the coupon. No money in advance. No deposit. No obligation to buy. Return or keep the Oliver as you decide after five days free trial. If you decide to keep the typewriter, you can pay cash or you may make over a year to pay at the easy rate of \$4 a month. Mail the coupon today—NOW.

Canadian Price, \$79

The OLIVER
Typewriter Company

733 Oliver Typewriter Bldg.
Chicago, Ill.

**Save
\$50.50**

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY,
733 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver No. 9 Typewriter for five days free inspection. If I keep it I will pay \$55 as follows: \$3 at the end of trial period and then at the rate of \$4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. If I make cash settlement at end of trial period I am to deduct ten per cent and remit to you \$49.50.

☐ If I decide not to keep it, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

☐ My shipping point is _____

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____

State _____

Occupation or Business _____

A Finer Typewriter at a Fair Price
Over 900,000 Sold

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

March
1922

AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

Vol. XLIX
No. 1

CONTENTS

- MASQUERADE. Complete Novelette . . . Katharine Hill . . . 1**
Joan Marvel had bought the social niche, which for a while she occupied, along with the clothes and specious beauty which were hers. And not until after her marriage did she discover that all purchase is, after all, commercial.
- THE SISTERHOOD OF DON. Short Story . . . Winston Bouvé . . . 40**
Don MacLane had an admiring sisterhood, a group of women who coddled him. But he demanded that Jill Fallon, his fiancée, devote all her attention to him alone.
- THE WOMAN HATER. Two-part Story . . . Elizabeth Irons Folsom . . . 53**
He had a distinct aversion for all women, as many of them would have readily attested, yet John Marshall saw him entering the home of the most colorful woman in town, an actress, on a short sojourn from the city.
- THE COWARD. Short Story . . . Frances O. J. Gaither . . . 67**
"Six threes—and red wheels," the old man had muttered, and that made of the woman he loved a coward.
- "HELLO, MARCIA!" Serial . . . Meade Minnigerode . . . 79**
The final installment of the year's most thrilling novel.
- THE INSIDE ROOM. Short Story . . . Clinton Dangerfield . . . 94**
When Keswick's lawyer traced his wife to a secluded cottage in the suburbs he laid bare more than a wife's apparent unfaithfulness.
- THE MOON OUT OF REACH. Serial . . . Margaret Pedler . . . 105**
In which Nan Davenant tries to step out of the wreckage which the news of Peter's marriage had made of her hopes.
- NOCTURNE. Verse . . . Josephine A. Meyer . . . 126**
- KINGS OF HEARTS. Series . . . Anice Terhune . . . 127**
Franz Liszt: Adored of Countless Women.
- WHEN SPRING COMES BACK TO GILEAD
Verse . . . Marion Francis Brown . . . 131**
- "JUST MY LITTLE GIRL." Short Story . . . James Francis Dwyer . . . 132**
Sergeant O'Brien and Policeman Pawley had a different kind of chivalry from that of Crandon Grace, copper magnate, who wore embroidered peacocks on his dressing gown.
- THE HOUSE OF GOLD. Short Story . . . John Seymour Wood . . . 142**
Did events prove Madame Chatard right in her contention that "the need for constancy is a terrible burden laid upon a woman's back?"
- IN BROADWAY PLAYHOUSES . . . Dorothy Parker . . . 155**
- HEIGH-HO, ROMANCE! Verse . . . Jessie Henderson . . . 159**
- TALKS WITH AINSLEE'S READERS . . . The Editor . . . 160**

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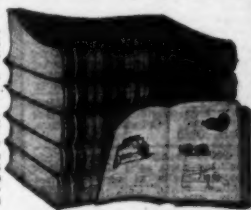
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American Technical Society,

Dept. X-593, Chicago, U. S. A.

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NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
REFERENCE _____

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Continued on second page following

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So Does He.
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How You Can Do It Too

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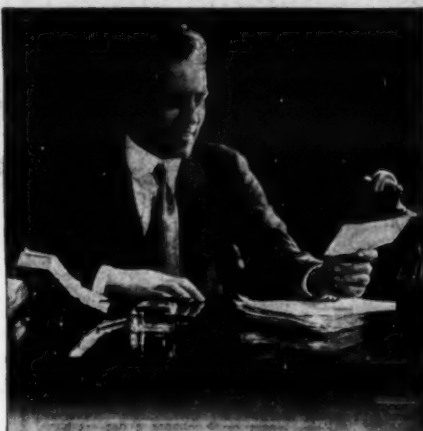
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AINSLEE'S

VOL. XLIX.

MARCH, 1922.

No. 1.



Masquerade

By

Katharine Hill

Author of "The Pearl and the Técla,"
"The Little Clay Pot," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THERE were four men in the long drawing-room and only two women, but all the men were Virginia's. The girl in the window seat looked sulkier and more repellent than before, as she watched the others group themselves again in their eternal pattern, when her aunt had left the piano and moved back to her favorite chaise longue.

Dick Brennan dropped to the club fender beside her, regardless of the heat that scorched his shoulder blades, Colonel Whittier took the chair that stood nearest her, Mr. Abercrombie was still turning over music, actually nearer to Joan than to his hostess, but all his attention was for Mrs. Bruce. Little Joe Lane, with the audacity that characterized him, was perching himself at Virginia's feet.

The fourfold slight to the girl had not seemed so marked while Mrs. Bruce was playing and singing—it is natural to cluster around a piano—but Joan's

heart and eyes were hot as it became clear that even now no one meant to come and talk to her.

She did not know it, but had an impulse visited one of the four to cross the room to her side, the expression on her young face would have sufficed to turn him back. Her eyebrows, low over her glooming eyes, were drawn into so tense a bar that little depressions sank above them, like dimples out of place, and her rather pale mouth was both pouting and set. Moreover, her attitude had the not always-happy carelessness of immaturity, and the afternoon dress that Virginia had helped her to choose was not well chosen. Yet Virginia's own gown, a straight-line Canton crape affair with heavy embroidery in Chinese blues and yellows, was exquisitely devised to flatter face and figure!

"How'd Mrs. Bruce ever come to have a niece like that?" Dick Brennan had marveled when, a few months earlier, Joan Marvell had joined her aunt's household.

"You'd expect any girl relative of hers to be peach-bloom perfection"—Lane had agreed—"which this girl certainly is not! Oh, well, it's tough on any flapper to be put in competition with

a finished enchantress like Virginia! Miss Marvell's sound in wind and limb, and a fellow needn't mind being seen about with her—anywhere except on a dancing floor, that is. She can't dance—I give you that."

"Can't dance, can't dress, can't talk!" Dick summed up rather savagely, for he had had to dance with Joan, and had been left alone with her for a laborious, long half hour before Virginia came in. "The girl's an all-around dumb-bell, and she ought to be operated on for that scowl."

"Good spec for some ex-service man out of a job, none the less. She may not get as many dancing partners as some, but she'll have a wide choice, I'll bet, when it comes to husbands!"

"Uh-huh—the pick of all the yellow dogs she meets," Brennan agreed. "I congratulate her."

There it was. More surely than her own cross looks, her paralyzed and paralyzing silences, the Marvell money kept unmarried men away from Joan. Hers was one of the conspicuous fortunes of New York, where accumulations of money must be large indeed to be even noticeable. The requirements of her guardian for her maintenance had been chronicled in the newspapers, and the radical ones had made estimates of the number of families that could have been supported on what this one girl threw away. There had been cars and saddle horses and yachts for her vacations, but complete social seclusion as well, under the care of governesses; she knew none of the gay young people who played at Newport or in the Berkshires, though she had made a few friends at boarding school—a school so expensive that it was able to offer its thirty pupils the simplicity of royal schoolrooms. The girls wore Peter Thompson suits and played outdoor games in the high-walled grounds, and had their reading strictly censored. School over, Joan had decided against

college, and her mother's sister, who had the personal guardianship, received her at last.

Miss Marvell had not been spoiled by her money. She had learned at school that it was vulgar to give a thought to it, and she supposed that all orphaned girls, except the quite poor ones who worked in shops or in domestic service, had to spend weary hours listening to incomprehensible explanations of things no girl would want to understand, before the ordeal was ended by "signing here." It never occurred to her that fear of the intolerable imputation of fortune hunting could hold men aloof from her, any more than that her wealth could be viewed as an attraction. She only felt herself neglected and resented it helplessly.

Jim Abercrombie gave up the search for the song he had wanted Virginia to sing and, as surely as steel to magnet, made for the group by the fireplace. It was no longer possible to overlook Joan's isolation, and her aunt, in her dragging, singularly sweet and high-pitched tones, said at last:

"Aren't you chilly over there, dear? Do come closer to the fire!"

Joan answered with the incredible *gaucherie* that had made her the despair of her teachers; she was choking with hurt feeling, past caring what her aunt, what these hateful men, thought.

"I'm not cold, thanks! But I *don't* seem to be exactly needed here, do I? No one has addressed a remark to me—till this minute—for the last three-quarters of an hour! I think I'll go for a walk!"

Virginia sat up, startled out of her usual serenity.

"Oh, my dear!" she murmured. But her niece stalked across the room unheeding, looking at no one, and flung out between the portières; had there been a door in the aperture, social training would scarcely have restrained her from the crude satisfaction of slam-

ming it. Her exit had all the emphasis of such a bang.

Mrs. Bruce looked plaintive, one of her best expressions.

"What an undisciplined baby it is! How could we talk to her when we were having music? It's a pity she's not musical. If she would only gather her own young friends about her more! Do forgive the rudeness of a foolish little girl, colonel—and go on with that delightful story!"

She fixed her lovely eyes on him with eager, flattering interest, and the beguiled soldier took up his tale. Virginia's pretty, spontaneous laughter when the point was reached ended the last lingering feeling of discomfort caused by Joan's outburst, and five minutes later it had been forgotten by every one of the men. But the memory of it still rankled with their hostess, and much later, when the others had taken reluctant departures and only little Joe Lane was left, she revived deliberately the subject of the late unpleasantness. No one ever took the trouble to disguise his feelings with Joe.

"Well, what do you think of that girl now, may I ask? Did you ever witness anything so abominable?"

"You know, on my honor," he said, "I had the thought of going over and talking to her, but the last time I did she pretty well had the nose off me! I wish now I'd gone, though."

"Well, she makes me tired!" Virginia resumed, with a petulance that, however unamiable, was somehow pretty. "The whole situation makes me tired. It was all very well while she was at school—but I can't have her making scenes in my drawing-room. What has she to complain of, I'd like to know? She ought to be as happy as the day is long. Nineteen—and all that money!"

"And the privilege of living with you! But then, as you mentioned, she's nineteen. And at that age, I suppose, being

plain about unmakes a girl's world. You couldn't understand that, of course—you who must have turned heads in your cradle—but you might be sorry for the poor girl."

She smiled subtly, a far-away look in her eyes.

"You think her plain?"

"Well—I don't want to be rude, you know. But—well——"

He stammered on, while Virginia marveled at the blindness of men, and remembered, with a small, quizzical gleam that her lowered eyelashes covered, a certain photograph of herself at nineteen, tucked away in her most private drawer and never exhibited to any eyes but her own. The heavy, inexpressive young face it pictured was, though fuller, in structure not unlike Joan's, and the absurd styles of the time had robbed the figure of any girlish grace it might have possessed if dressed in the simple, almost classic fashions of to-day.

All the Marvell women developed late. It was a serious disadvantage to them in a society that features girls in their teens, but at twenty-four or five they came into their own. Virginia Bruce had been an acknowledged beauty for a dozen years, and people had forgotten that she had not always been one. What she had won late stayed late—but it would not stay forever.

And she took a malicious satisfaction now in hearing her niece's looks disparaged, the keener for her knowledge that the wheel was slowly, but inexorably, turning.

CHAPTER II.

Joan herself, walking at a furious pace around the reservoir, was remembering, angrily going over word by word the little scene and what had preceded it, as if to justify herself before a non-existent jury.

"It was three quarters of an hour—I kept looking at my wrist watch—and

I consider it was much ruder of those men not to speak a word to me than it was of me to say what I did. What did I say, anyhow? That I didn't seem to be needed, and was going for a walk! She can pour out her own tea! That's the only time they do talk to me; they have to say cream or lemon and how much sugar!

"The worst of it all is, I can understand so well how they feel! She is exquisite, with her honey-colored hair done in that intricate, fascinating way, and her eyes so wide apart and blue, and that way she has of moving and speaking. Why couldn't I have been born pretty? I do think people with yellow hair and blue eyes are *too lucky*. Yet Aunt Virginia is thirty-seven years old—and I was brought up to suppose there was some advantage in being nineteen. All the books have it that way. She ought to be subsiding gracefully into a corner—but that's just it, she'd subside so gracefully that every man in the room would follow her into her corner and couldn't be pried out!

"The books must be wrong, that's all. Perhaps they're wrong about everything. They may tell nothing but sort of agreed-on sirupy lies the writers think people will like to read. Perhaps life's just a sordid helter-skelter really, and if you haven't the luck to be pretty and charming you can just lump it; there'll be nothing for you, ever. Perhaps it's not even true that there's one special man somewhere for every woman, even the plain ones, a man who will love her and understand her—and if that's not true, I might as well jump in the river first as last. Oh, that *must* be true! I have to have something, and I'd like to know what there is in my life now——"

She slackened her gait a little and her face fell into wistful lines as she forgot her wounded feelings and gave herself to the romantic dreams of her age.

"Some one who would look at Aunt

Virginia, and see that she was beautiful, of course—I don't stipulate for a blind man—but who wouldn't be moved by her beauty any more than if she were a picture on the wall. Some one who'd only be interested in me, only care if I were pleased or tired or bored, who'd look at me the way they all look at her, and want to be with me all the time. I'd pay it all back to him," she mused passionately. "The man doesn't live who'd have more love from his wife. I'd never say a single cross word to him, and I wouldn't care what he did; he could steal or murder or anything—and I'd forgive him at once!"

For never in the girl's clear recollection, never since the death of her parents in a motor smash when she was less than ten years old, had there been any love in her life. There had been consideration, there had been everywhere the implication that her welfare was of paramount importance, and there had never been, of course, even an approach to overt unkindness. But neither through election nor through blood ties was Joan first with any of the people who surrounded her. She had looked forward eagerly to her life with Aunt Virginia, who had sent her presents and kindly worded letters and a lovely framed photograph of herself, but who had never, for some freshly deplored reason each summer, been able to be with her for the holidays.

It had not taken long to make sure that the beautiful aunt had nothing to give her. Under the graceful manners there was something that the girl read too easily as contempt, mingled with another element that she could not interpret, though she felt it and was bewildered and hurt by it. She could not dream that Virginia Bruce was jealous of her youth and of her wealth, but her own frustrated impulse of affection changed gradually to distrust and dislike.

She had given herself with the

greater intensity, after this final disappointment, to dreams of that other love, man's love, that she had wanted to believe must come to every woman. She had lost her parents, she had no sisters or brothers, and Aunt Virginia was—Aunt Virginia; surely fate had done its worse now, and ill luck would not dog her out of her girlhood! Yet sometimes she fancied bitterly that it might, that the man who had been destined to love her—like all those others who should have loved her—had died, too, had been killed, perhaps, in the war. But for the most part her imaginings about him were hopeful.

Presently the brisk exercise, the sharp air, brought Joan to the consciousness that she had not had her tea, and with the ease of her years she made the transition from romantic imaginings to the preoccupations of appetite. The beverage itself was as negligible to her as to most American women, but the bread and butter and the little cakes which it accompanies and excuses were another matter altogether.

She might taxi downtown and do herself well at the Ritz or elsewhere, but that would be lonesome, and she would feel conspicuous. A better idea occurred to her. She was on the west side of the reservoir now, near the path that leads to the Ninetieth Street entrance to the park, and she remembered that the pleasant woman who taught French at her old school lived on Central Park West, a few blocks farther north. Madame Lemercier was devoted to what she called "le five o'clock," and she had asked Joan to come to see her.

It was a pleasanter-looking Miss Marvell than the house on Park Avenue knew, who ran up the stairs in the elevatorless building to meet a woman in black who came out upon the top-most landing.

"*Tiens! C'est la petite Jeanne!*" she exclaimed, but immediately afterward

fell into English, since her guest was no longer at school. "How glad I am to see you, my child! I have wondered about you and your gay life with Virginia. You remember I used to know Virginia—we were old schoolfellows, she and I, although we see so little of each other now. Tell me, is it as happy a thing as you expected, to get away from school and give all your time to pleasure? But, of course, it is not till much later that one realizes how good were the school days!"

She talked on, her manner of uttering them giving grace to platitudes, while she watched the girl narrowly. Joan, for her part, satisfied her young hunger with croissants and brioches, and between bites assured madame—as she called her in school-girl fashion—that she did indeed already regret school.

"I don't think society is so much fun—no, I don't! Aunt Virginia's lovely to me, of course, and it's rather nice not to have to get up in the morning till you feel like it—no seven o'clock bell! But, really, I rather miss the lessons! French, now, I always liked French. Oh, madame"—the idea came to her suddenly, born of the pleasantness of the unconstrained hour—"why shouldn't I take some more lessons of you? Of course, I did take for about eight years. Still, you wouldn't say I *knew* French, would you?"

"You have still something to learn," the Frenchwoman admitted gravely. "Fluency, greater precision of accent, the idioms, certain nuances—oh, yes. It would give me great pleasure to continue the conversation lessons, select books for you to read, accompany you to plays, when I know of any representations being given. Alas that *Le Vieux Colombier* is no more!"

Eagerly they settled the details.

"That is, unless Aunt Virginia has any plans that conflict—then I'll telephone, of course. Do you have many pupils here? Oh!" For the bell that

asked entrance downstairs had sounded, and Simone Lemercier was on her feet to press the button that opened the front door. "Is that a pupil now? Had I better go?"

"No—and no! It is not a pupil at this hour, and, if a friend, so much the better that you are here. I love to have my friends know each other!"

She moved out into the hall, and Joan, on her feet with the school-girl good manners that were still second nature, heard the soft, "*Tiens! C'est Paul!*" with which madame certified to herself the identity of the new arrival.

Joan lifted startled eyes to the tall figure that entered the room, and a sudden rush of blood scorched her cheeks as the lamplight showed her Paul Breckinridge's face. Since she had come to live with her aunt the girl had met dozens, hundreds of men, she believed—young men and old men, clever and distinguished men, insignificant ones, shy ones and confident ones. But she had not, until this moment, encountered one of whom her heart had said to her immediately:

"This could be he!"

She felt breathless, murmured something, and sat down weakly. Her heart, after its first plunge, was thumping wildly.

"Seems a shy kid," Paul thought.

He and Madame Lemercier fell at once into interested talk, of world politics in general and French politics in particular, of the week's exhibits at art galleries, of recent books and recent criticism. But deftly, without perceptible maneuvering, Joan felt herself taken into the conversation as she never was at home; opinions she did not know she had were drawn from her, and the clever, suggestive interplay wove around her a fascination that was quite new.

Yet there were moments in which the other two wrangled over some point too subtle for her comprehension, when she withdrew from the conversation and

took courage to study the man whose presence so warmed the air and quickened the interest of living.

He had good looks, of course, for girls of nineteen do not yield their hearts at first sight except to personable men. His dark hair was crisp and vigorous, and perhaps half an inch too long, his eyes were richly blue, black lashed, humorous now, but capable of effective languishing, and his sensitive mouth had the hint of disillusion, of faint bitterness and austerity that is far from unattractive to a romantic girl. The line of his jaw was fine and clean, his figure well knit, and his shapely hands expressive. But no item of this catalogue, not even the whole added together, Joan thought excitedly, could justify the strange feeling of agitation that had come to her with his entrance. No, the only explanation of that must be that here was her "one special man!" He did not know it yet, perhaps—she smiled compassion for his ignorance—but they were destined to love each other. Perhaps he even fancied himself in love with some one else at present, some Rosalind who would find herself unaccountably neglected in the near future!

The striking of a little clock on the desk recalled Joan to the present, and she gasped in real consternation.

"Seven o'clock—oh, dear, that is late! Please forgive me for staying so long, madame. I've so enjoyed seeing you again, and I'm coming for those lessons. But I must fly now; we're going out to-night. Do you think it would be all right for me to have a taxi? I never do, after dark, but it would save a lot of time, wouldn't it?"

Happily Simone could vouch for the character of a certain Williams whose station was just around the corner and who proved immediately available, so that Breckinridge's duty might be considered performed when he had put Miss Marvell into the cab. But Simone

looked at him anxiously when he returned, and was scarcely surprised to see that his face was strained and moody.

"Of course! The address to repeat to Williams!" she exclaimed. "I am sorry, Paul. But you need never see the child again—it was a complete accident that she was here. She is coming often for French lessons, however, I should warn you. If it is your preference not to encounter her, don't come again without telephoning first."

"Why, I've nothing against the *girl*!" he exclaimed, grimacing nervously as he dropped into a chair.

"Naturally not! A good child, and in some ways—pitiable. To live with the beautiful Virginia, I imagine, is no sinecure for any one, and for a young girl, inexperienced, at her mercy—oh, la-la!"

"I remember, now, hearing that there was a niece. Virginia used to pity herself for the responsibility. But she was certainly never in evidence in the days when——"

"Paul! I have wanted to ask you—but it has been difficult to speak of the subject. Here it has brought itself up, and I will say it. All that was four years ago—four years! Have you not even made a beginning at getting over your disappointment? I have felt so guilty always, since it was I who introduced you to Virginia. Surely it is time to forget her now! Some other woman, some young girl, perhaps, without wiles, with only simplicity and an affectionate heart——"

"Sorry, but there isn't anybody at all—anybody that I care about seriously, I mean. Don't think I'm wearing the willow for Virginia Bruce, though, Simone. I've got far enough away from that episode to understand her better now, though perhaps not so far off as to see her the way you see her, the way a woman of experience and penetration must see her. The only thing is, I

don't want to meet her again. I'm—well, to be perfectly frank, I'm afraid to.

"As a human being Virginia is a social debtor of the most flagrant description. In so far as she's a force at all, she's a destructive one, and for the rest she's merely a consumer of service, money, hearts. But, oh, isn't she a delight to the eyes! Come, now, shouldn't we, as artists in living, forgive her a great deal for the sake of the series of pictures she presents to an enraptured world? D'you remember her in that lavender, gauzy thing with the silver ribbons, the day you took me out there first? And the tableau at Mrs. Waring's charity show, when she was *Thais*? I think I never saw any one with such an absolutely Greek head—that girl had a good profile, too," he added astutely. "I noticed that."

Simone eyed him speculatively. She was very fond of the young man, and had a half-maternal interest in his welfare, being a dozen years his senior. In the circles that knew them both, Paul was a much discussed person, and nowadays the comments were often tinged with disappointment and concern. Half a dozen years before a brilliant boy had blown into New York from some outlying district, had talked delightfully to be sure, but had put in the bulk of most days at his desk, working feverishly. The immediate result had been a half dozen striking short stories and then a novel that had been perhaps the most talked-of piece of fiction of the year.

Learning that Madame Lemer cier knew him, Virginia Bruce had peremptorily decreed that he was to be brought out to a garden party she was giving at her country place in Connecticut. He had gone, he had seen, she had conquered. Since then there had been no more books.

And his friends wondered what Breckinridge lived on, for it was known that his father's business had failed in

the early years of the war, and that he had not a penny which he did not earn!

Simone had been long enough in America to have learned to speak excellent English. But she was French at heart, and she reasoned now like a Frenchwoman—a Frenchwoman who felt like a mother to a promising, charming, but impecunious young man. He had noticed that Joan Marvell had a good profile.

"As you say," she repeated, taking out her knitting from its bag, "as you say, you have nothing against the girl!"

CHAPTER III.

It was odd how often Joan met Paul Breckinridge when she went across the park for her French lessons. Sometimes he was there when she came and stayed on to make a third in the conversation.

"I don't have to go if I'll speak French, do I?" he demanded. "Miss Marvell ought to learn twice as fast if she has two people to listen to."

"She does not wish to learn your villainous argot of the boulevards and the trenches! I teach the pure tongue!"

But Simone would detain him in conversation with indulgent smiles, even while she affected to dismiss him.

Or he would come to tea on a stipulated afternoon, to find that Joan's lesson was just finished, and that she was staying on, eating brioches with a neglected teacup at her elbow. Other people might drop in, but somehow Breckinridge and the girl would find themselves maneuvered into a corner together, and once or twice, as spring came on and the afternoons were longer, it happened naturally enough that he walked across the park with her, leaving her, however, when they reached the Fifth Avenue side.

Joan lived, as a girl in love does, in the time she spent with Paul. When she was not with him she was thinking

about him, remembering everything he had said and how he had said it, and planning conversations she might carry on with him. A book became an excuse for dreaming in Virginia's presence; to be alone was, for the present, happiness. She no longer cared because the men who came and went at home had only perfunctory attention for her, and she was rather annoyed than pleased when Mrs. Bruce's latest foreigner, the Marchese di Saldagno, reversed all precedent by seeking her out whenever he called and talking to her about his mother and sisters, while his dark eyes rolled respectful passion the while.

The affair was wholly perfunctory to the Italian mind, and Saldagno did not even take the trouble to propose to the girl in person, though he must have known the American custom. It was left for Virginia to send for her niece at the hour of her own breakfast in bed, the morning after his declaration to herself.

"All right, Louise. Oh, Joan. Sit down! I've something to say to you."

Joan glanced about her, then closed the door reluctantly. Her aunt's room always made her think of the Venusberg, *Kundry's* bower, or some similar laboratory for the hatching of amorous enchantments. Virginia's long dressing table was loaded with cosmetics and perfumes in fantastic jars, countless filmy accessories of dress lay about, trifles utterly feminine, but as sternly calculated to their uses in the eternal campaign as so many shells for machine guns; there were mirrors at every angle and in every light, and the beautiful woman herself, voluptuously relaxed on her pillows, a gold braid over each lace-draped shoulder, was the complete exposition of the intention of her room. Louise, mistress of rites through the hours when Virginia was in retirement here, earned every cent of her wages, and was wont to comment bitterly on the difference between her lot and that

of Joan's maid, Peggy, who had been a humble assistant in the beginning to the trained nurse of the girl's babyhood, and whose conception of aids to the toilet scarcely soared, even now, above talcum powder. She drew Miss Marvell's bath, shampooed her hair twice a month, sewed in ruches and ran ribbons in lingerie, packed trunks on occasion—further than that Joan's austere habits scarcely demanded service at all.

"Well—what is it?" Joan demanded, removing and dropping to the floor, with the gesture she might have used toward an intrusive caterpillar, a smoke-gray scarf embroidered in silver that trailed across the cushions of the nearest chair.

"Saldagno wants to marry you—he spoke to me about it last night."

Joan was interested—for this was her first proposal—amused and a little indignant all at once.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and a moment later added: "But why to you?"

"Surely you know that's the way these things are done abroad. He's very correct, and it's a very sensible arrangement, really. Nothing's more absurd than our way of leaving it to little girls like you to make these decisions for themselves. If we were in Italy I should simply tell you that it had been arranged that you were to marry Saldagno. He has really a very good position in Naples, and these upper-class Italians are quite Anglo-Saxon in their ways, you know—go in for sports a lot, and all that. It would be a very suitable marriage for you. But since we're not Italians, naturally, I take the first opportunity of putting the thing up to you. How do you like the man yourself?"

"Why, I thought he was all right. He has much the best manners of any of the men who come here. But—Aunt Virginia!—why, we've met awfully few times. Just once at the opera and the time he came here to dinner and about

three calls. He *can't* be in love with me!"

Yet she was ridiculously pleased and flattered by the inference that he must be, and—remembering how quickly her own heart had been captured in that first encounter with Paul's eyes—quite ready to believe that Saldagno had indeed succumbed to hers, Virginia's mocking laugh ended her illusion.

"In love with you! Of course he's not in love with you. It's the *beaux yeux* of your money that he can't resist. He quite frankly told me that his estates were terribly involved—"

"And he knows that I have a good deal of money—and he kindly offers to take me as an encumbrance along with it! A-a-agh!" Joan got to her feet with a sound of disgust. "Anything more horrid, more base—I suppose I did know it was their beastly custom over there, but I never thought anybody would dare put it that way to me. Well, thank Heaven, I'm an American! Really, Aunt Virginia, I wonder you took the trouble to pass on this—this insult to me. I should think you'd better have answered him at the time as—as you must have known I would want to answer him!"

Mrs. Bruce poured out her second cup of coffee with a serene face. When she had creamed and sweetened it to her taste she said evenly:

"Then I'm to tell him 'No?'"

"Aunt Virginia, how can you pretend there's any question? Doesn't *love* mean anything to these people? Why on earth should he dream I'd be willing to marry him, and give up my chance of ever being loved for myself? Perhaps he thinks I'd like his old title. Oh, I think it's sickening, sickening! I did like that man, at least I thought better of him than to suppose he'd be capable of such meanness—not even to pretend to love me, to want to make a bargain of marriage! Isn't there anything sacred to—"

"Yes, yes—can't we take the rest as read? You're very crude, my dear, if you only knew it!"

"Crude! Because I don't want to be married for my money!"

"There's nothing more provincial," Virginia expounded wearily, "than to try everything alien by your own standards, and nothing leads you, really, to false judgments. I dare say, if the truth were known, that Saldagno gives love a much more exalted place in his life than the business men downtown who'd rave whole-heartedly with you against him. Only, as he sees it, love's one thing and marriage is another. And there's something else I might as well say while we're on this subject."

There were several reasons why the idea of marrying Joan to Saldagno had pleased Mrs. Bruce, and the disappointment she felt at the girl's veto made her take pleasure in going on.

"You're a very rich girl, Joan, and—there's no reason why we should gloss over the matter between ourselves, is there?—not a very successful one socially, on the showing of the winter that's just past! You've gone about as much as most girls, you've had expensive frocks and the best dancing lessons, and so on—you haven't been at a disadvantage in any way. And is there one single man—besides Saldagno—who's shown any interest in you at all? Money's a very nice thing to have, and it's only fair there should be some drawbacks connected with it. A rich girl has to ask herself, about *every* man who makes love to her—not the foreigners only—whether he'd be doing it if she were poor. And in your case, Joan—you might as well make up your mind to it first as last—in all probability he wouldn't!"

She buttered her third roll.

Joan hated her aunt at that moment, but the calm assurance of Virginia's manner carried conviction.

"You mean that—no man could love me for myself?"

"Oh, everything's possible," Mrs. Bruce said flippantly. "I only mean that you'd do well to come out of the clouds a bit. You've been reading too many novels. In real life the Don Quixote you're waiting for is exactly the man who won't ask you *because* you're rich, while the average citizen to whom your money is an attraction will feel under an obligation to you because of it, and make all the better husband. Perhaps you might consider the matter a little more before we give Saldagno his final answer! Meantime, I'm going to ring now for Louise—it's quite time to get up."

If Virginia had only hinted, two months earlier, what she had just emphasized so ruthlessly, Joan would have brooded bitterly upon it for days and weeks. Now, after some disgusted consideration of a new and sordid viewpoint, her mind swung happily again to thoughts of Breckinridge. He liked her, she felt exultantly sure; he was poor, for madame had told her so, yet in all their walks and talks he had never come near to sentimentality. And suddenly this fact, which had been a puzzling chagrin to her, fell into a pattern with what Virginia had been saying and assumed a pleasing coherence with the rest.

She had thought impatiently that if she had been the man their affair must have reached its conclusion on the first occasion when they were alone. She would have behaved like one of those magazine heroes who, conceding that their course is unusual, yet say—as they stand in the conservatory after that first dance—"Life's too short for delays. I want you to know to-night that I love you!"

For Joan argued quite naïvely from the fact that she had fallen in love with Paul that he must have fallen in love with her. The dart that had driven

at her heart when she looked up first and saw him must have struck both ways; he, too, must have felt its hurtling force. Now it was quite beautifully clear to her that Paul didn't ask her to marry him merely because she was rich and he was poor. She thought him absurd to nourish such a scruple, but she thought of his absurdity with tenderness.

She began to play with daring little tentatives in her own mind.

CHAPTER IV.

Madame Lemer cier went shopping with her friend Frances Lathrop on Saturday, for she had no school work that day, and quite naturally had lunch at the Lathrops' in Gramercy Park afterward. Their house was a sort of center for one of New York's hundred literary, artistic, and dramatic societies, and if there was a tinge of respectability about this one, a too liberal sprinkling of commercial success, so that they were spoken of scornfully by the groups of the lower West Side, still it is unavoidable that some of the pursuers of the arts shall arrive in time, and perhaps it is those who work the hardest who oftenest do so. Simone, who, having failed honorably at painting, had declined upon teaching for a livelihood, and Paul Breckinridge, who did not work at all, might seem to redeem their circle at least from the damaging charge of universal success.

Simone and Frances and Jack fell into talk about Paul to-day, as they often did—they were all very fond of him.

"I can't think what the boy lives on," said Frances, leaning her elbows on the table. "He couldn't still be getting royalties from 'The Stalemate,' could he, Jack? Doesn't a novel do all its real selling the first year or so?"

"Perhaps he's sold the movie rights," Lathrop suggested.

"I had such a nice plan for him," sighed Simone. "But it is not going to succeed, *hélas!*"

"A plan?" Frances laughed shortly. "What sort of plan? The only plan for Paul is to make him buckle down to his typewriter and go to *work!* I had a plan for him once, but my nerve failed. You know how he can always sketch the most fascinating ideas for things he says he's *going* to write—and never does? Well, my plan was to bribe some doctor to tell him he had an incurable disease—and about a year to live. If he believed he had only one year, he might try to make use of it, I figured. But Jack discouraged me—being a husband! Oh, excuse me, Simone—what was *your* plan?"

"A rich marriage," said the Frenchwoman succinctly.

"Well, anything that sounds less like Paul! Who was the girl?"

"Virginia Bruce's niece."

"Good heavens, hasn't he had enough of that family?"

"But the girl is quite different, entirely unsophisticated, a loyal, honest young person and not too attractive, though for my part I see possibilities in her. It would have been a marriage like a French marriage, where the young wife develops under her husband's influence, instead of conceiving herself a completed personality in her teens. Joan comes to me for lessons and—on her side the thing was done when they first met. *Un coup de foudre*, no less! So I threw them together as much as possible, but it is all no use. He talks to her as to a boy, *bon enfant* as he is with every one, but he will never go further. Virginia took everything he had, and after four years he can still care nothing for another woman! As for a prudent forethought, an envisaging of the girl as a desirable *partie*—he is as far from that as a child. What I can do is very limited, you see. I told Virginia my opinion of her at

the time when she behaved so badly to him, and I no longer see her, nor would Paul, I believe, on any pretext enter her house. What can be done in my little rooms, where Joan arrives in street costume and I can absent myself only for short periods? If they could meet at a dance, with music playing—her arms and neck are really very pretty!"

"Simone, you amuse me," Frances declared. "But, seriously, I'd help if I could. I don't know so much about the money, but having a nice girl in love with him might be Paul's salvation, and honestly I'm beginning to be worried about that boy. Jack and I were talking about him only last night. How easy it is for a man that's a good talker and has an attractive personality to go to perdition in this town, once his ambition is sprained! There are so many places where they'll feed you and put up the drinks in return for making the party go, and he does run sometimes with an awfully fast crowd—people none of us know, who play cards for frightfully high stakes at those awful parties that go on for days and days!"

"That's not where he gets his money," Jack contributed briefly. "He plays in rotten luck all the time."

She looked a wifely "How do you know?" and then resumed:

"Paul could meet the girl at society affairs if he wanted to—I know Virginia used to parade him about everywhere, and no doubt he still gets invitations—trust a society hostess not to let a man like Paul slip away for lack of encouragement! But I know he doesn't go anywhere now in that milieu. How hard it is to engineer these things for a man who's not interested himself! Tell you what, Simone—bring her here to one of the Saturday night dances—why not to-night? She'll have a date, of course, still you might try. We can provide the music and the chance to wear evening dress, anyhow,

and our parties, if not functions, are always fun, aren't they?"

Simone telephoned the invitation to Joan, accordingly, as soon as she got up from the lunch table, and did not forget to hint that Breckinridge was sure to come.

"Oh, do you think—of course I'd love that kind of party! We have another engagement, but I'll scratch. Listen, madame, what ought I to wear? I mean, is it sort of studio-y and bohemian? Or would it be better to be smart?"

"Where is Virginia this afternoon?" countered Simone.

"Why—out somewhere. I don't know just where."

"Then I think," came the voice over the telephone briskly, "I'll just run up for ten minutes and help you choose!"

There are two distinct kinds of Frenchwomen, the ones who show the rest of the world how to dress, and the others who wear shabby black. Probably many of the latter could master the art of dress as well as the first, but being more interested in other things and not caring to do at all what must be done less than perfectly, they shrug the whole subject away. Simone was such a woman, and, herself indifferent to what she wore, she had frowned more than once over Joan Marvell's choice of clothes. Now, entering Virginia Bruce's house for the first time since her quarrel with its mistress, she sat perched on a chair in Joan's bedroom and looked critically at frock after frock as Peggy brought out each one on its little hanger.

They were all expensive frocks, from the best houses, but their prevailing colors—apple greens, Prussian blues, and crude pinks—made Simone's eyebrows draw together.

"Something black—or white—is there nothing?" she asked helplessly.

"Virginia says I'm too young for black, and that white is trying. Do

you think it isn't? I don't believe I've a white thing—except my graduation dress. Find it, please, Peggy—but that's a year old, though it's true I wore it only once——”

“A-ah!” interrupted Madame Lemerrier on a deep-drawn breath of satisfaction. In another minute she had taken the dress from Peggy, stared at it with half-shut eyes, caught up a pair of scissors, and was slashing at the neck.

“Turn it in here—so—the sleeves, there! You can have it ready in time? See, I have put in the pins.”

The result, when Joan appeared at the Lathrop's dance, was a more attractive picture than the rich Miss Marvell, who could have commanded all the resources of New York and Paris, had presented at any entertainment of the past season. Paul, who would have danced with her anyhow on the strength of their meetings at Simone's, went to his duty with a certain quickening of pleasure. The poor little rich girl really looked rather nice at night, he thought, and as he was one of those men with whom it is almost impossible to dance badly, he was not much disappointed during their subsequent toddle. But he said:

“There's a little balcony opening from the upstairs sitting room, where you can look down on the park. Let's go up there, shall we? It's really rather nice.”

And there was a half moon riding over the house tops and the little square, and the dance music rose muted and plaintive from below. Joan wouldn't have a wrap, and the silver light found and caressed her young throat, gleamed along her round arms. Her dark hair, in which the sun woke no glints, shone frostily over her shadowed face.

Paul was as far from the idea of making love to her as from that of leaping to destruction over the balcony rail. He could do that sort of thing, if he felt in the mood for it, and, indeed, had a pleasant conviction that he

did it rather well. But this girl was the friend of a woman whom he liked immensely and to whom he owed much kindness; she was very young, and so rich that the mind automatically threw up a barrier before any thought of courtship in connection with her. He said, as he might have said to a child whom he credited with imagination:

“Just think of all the things that old moon looks down on besides ourselves! Dark, jagged mountains, and she picks out all the little silver waterfalls—tumbling seas, all racing after each other to shore, jostling in the moon path—deserts, too. Did you ever see the plains by moonlight?”

“No, never,” she admitted. “It seems to me I've seen awfully little. They used to take me abroad in the summer—until nineteen-fourteen. Since then it's always been the Adirondacks. I don't know why.”

“No, nor I. I talk about the trail, but I don't seem to hit it. After all, there's something about this town—— But one has only one life. It's supremely foolish, really, to drift—to let outside forces shape our lives for us——” Paul was thinking aloud now, half forgetting the girl at his side. “A man ought to line up the whole shebang, decide what he wants—and go after it!”

“Do you think that?” she gasped.

“Know it! Even if there seem a thousand inhibitions, if it's awfully hard to bring one's self to the point——”

His work was in Breckinridge's mind, the work that he had meant to do for the greater glory of Virginia, and which the withdrawal of her interest had left so strangely stale and even distasteful. But Joan read a different meaning into what he said. She thought she understood, from words that indeed might have borne out her interpretation, that he wanted—*her*! All the nobility of his nature rose against the asking, because she was so rich,

"Then why don't you?" she demanded tensely.

He laughed.

"Preaching's one thing, practice another," he offered lightly. "I know well enough where salvation lies, for me. But for a hundred petty reasons I keep putting off!"

She tried, poor child, to help him. She leaned forward and laid her arm on the balcony rail, stretching her hand till it was only an inch from his; she hadn't the courage for that last inch.

"If you wanted," she said hoarsely, "I'd give it all away!"

He couldn't imagine what she meant; it didn't seem to matter much. Her voice sounded odd, though, almost tragic. In a shift of posture to look into this he moved his hand on the iron railing—he had not noticed the advance of hers—and felt beneath it, to his amazement, cold fingers that trembled. He was too startled for the instant recoil that might have saved him.

To Joan his touch was the final encouragement she needed. Words broke from her, triumphant, confident, in the half dark, words never to be caught back or misunderstood or credited with other meanings.

"Paul, Paul—I've been so stupid; it was only to-day that I began to understand! Of course it was hard for you to ask me, because of the stupid money—well, then, I ask you! We love each other, don't we, Paul? Don't we both know it?" She laughed a little, brokenly, and flung back her head to gaze at the strangely immobile bulk of him, dark and featureless against the sky. "Paul, d-darling! Why, I've loved you from the very first minute. Would you really have let us both go on being unhappy for such a silly scruple? Mr. Breckinridge, I have the honor to ask you to be my husband! There, I hope that satisfies your silly pride!"

He couldn't speak. He did not need to. At the end of her formal proposal

Joan flung her arms around his neck and hid her face on his shoulder. His arms went around her readily enough, though it was in pitying consternation, and he had then the endless interval of a first embrace in which to consider the piteous predicament. The girl clung to him, drawing half-sobbing breaths, and as long as he held her tightly he knew that she would not stir. Paul bit his lips and swore in his heart.

He had not, of course, given the shadow of a cause for her assumptions. He was guiltless, and if he explained her mistake now, there was no reason why his conscience should ever reproach him with her self-invited humiliation. Yet he shrank inexpressibly from saying the simple words that would have extricated him: "You've made a mistake—I'm not in the least in love with you—have no wish to marry you!"

He thought the problem through at lightning speed. She really had fallen in love with him, the poor little rich girl! And since he couldn't have, was never to have, the woman he had really desired, what was his freedom that he should refuse it to anybody who strongly wanted it? Not that he loved Virginia now, he scrupulously assured himself. He was quite cured. But it had hurt, that cure—God, how it had hurt! He remembered his hopes and dreams about Virginia, and the shock of the first misgiving, and all his long anguish that had given her, he supposed, some perverse pleasure, and the final poison of her definite refusal.

And here was this girl, this figure so soft and warm and unwelcome in his arms—her declaration must have demanded a double resolution; rejection, to her, must be a doubly distilled draft.

Unconsciously his grasp had relaxed, and Joan stirred, lifting her head. He had no time to think of the more serious consequences his act entailed, of the stupendous difficulty of being a passable husband to an unloved woman, of that

other aspect of the case, a girl's right to a real lover, not the best actor of the part. He thought only that it would be kinder and easier to fling her over the balcony railing than to say, "You have made a mistake," and the rest.

He drew a deep breath.

"I have the honor to accept your offer," he whispered hurriedly, in the spirit of her proposal, and kissed her on the mouth.

To him—it was part of what he had let himself in for; to Joan, an exquisite pang, a fainting ecstasy, the justification of life with all its bitternesses, her initiation into the heaven her courage had won.

CHAPTER V.

It has been said that every man, the morning after he has become engaged to be married, wakes with a sinking heart. The sweeping statement is insusceptible of proof, but in the case of Paul Breckinridge that feeling of something gone seriously wrong, of a misfortune hanging over one whose outlines are nebulous till the fog of sleep lifts and it defines itself starkly once more, was certainly present that Sunday.

He fell back on his pillow and stared at the ceiling. It was quite clear to him now that his behavior last night had been idiotic, that he ought to have said to Joan, on the instant: "You have made a mistake—I don't love you—have no wish to marry you!" It would have been quite easy then, and now, of course, it had become next to impossible. Why, in so many words he had accepted her offer! No exit that way now.

In the opinion of many people Paul Breckinridge was an extremely clever fellow—even a genius in his way. His vivid, effortless characterizations, his austere selection and deft handling of his material, his flare for the dramatic which was also the true, had startled

many critics into enthusiasm. But, no more than most people, could he analyze his own soul. He had been bitterly hurt four years before, and he still sincerely thought of himself as a disappointed and broken man.

"*Je vivais*," he would have said with the French poet, "*par politesse*!" Out of sheer reluctance to seem to criticize the performance or to upset others by a sudden exit, as one might see a boring play through to the final curtain.

The fact was that he had got out of his bachelor existence a great deal more satisfaction than is enjoyed by many men who believe themselves happily married. The money worries of a single man with plenty of dinner invitations are not very serious, and small royalties still dribbled in steadily from "The Stalemate." He had the creature comforts of the average New Yorker, which is to say the royal luxuries of a century ago; he had peace when he wanted peace, and he had, also, every opportunity for the stimulating talk that was the breath of life to his contentious soul; he had friends who cared for him perhaps more than he deserved, and if he had been able to take out his broken heart and look at it, he would have found that it was nicely mended.

Some inkling of all this came to him now, with the realization that his easy-going life was ended. His home, he supposed, would be in some sort of palace after his marriage, and there would be uncounted servants under foot, and he would forget what the subway was like because cars would wait on his footsteps. Joan would entertain a lot, and he would be expected to appear when she did, a prospect which daunted him less than it might have most literary men. He liked a crowd, movement, gayety, dancing, acting, or what not.

What was harder to become reconciled to was the thought of Joan Marvell always at his side, claiming his first

attention and his love. Paul writhed a little at that. Oh, hell!

But presently he dressed and adjured himself to take up his burden. He went out to a florist's and selected some pink roses for his fiancée, and then he called her up as in duty bound. Qualms assailed him as he did this, using the familiar number that he had once called many times a day. Meeting Virginia was going to be unavoidable now—why, she might even answer the telephone, if she happened to be sitting near it! But it was a servant who answered, and in another moment Joan's happy voice was in his ears.

"I've told my aunt—she disapproves! Isn't that funny?" were almost her first words. "Yes, it is funny, because she can't stop us! Perhaps I oughtn't to have told you that she didn't seem pleased—of course, she'll get reconciled to the idea and pretend to be. She says she used to know you, by the way. You never told me!"

"I've not seen anything of her for a long time," he said carefully. "When may I come to see you?"

Seeing Joan inevitably meant seeing Virginia as well. He had to present himself at the home of his fiancée, and be received, amiably or otherwise, by her nearest relative and guardian. Mrs. Bruce made the interview short and formal that afternoon; she came into the drawing-room dressed for the street, her redoubtable fascinations sheathed in tailored suit and veil.

"How d'you do, Mr. Breckinridge! Joan's news is quite a surprise. I didn't even know that you two knew each other! What a very negligible quantity a girl's guardian is in this country!"

"I am very sorry you should think we disregarded you," Paul said. Her presence made him almost unbearably nervous, stirring all the old troubling memories, and he hardly knew how to conduct himself. He almost laughed at the

wild hope that suddenly shot through him—what if Virginia used her authority to forbid the banns!

The engagement certainly did not please her, as she made evident in the half dozen cool sentences she uttered before she went out to her car. There was the well-understood coquette's objection to some one else's having the man she did not want herself, but there was more than that to disquiet her in the prospect of her niece's marriage, and had she been able to prevent it she would assuredly have done so.

Virginia Bruce had little or no money of her own. Since Joan came into her charge she had had every advantage that wealth offers; she had lived without the slightest self-denial in luxurious households, maintained at the expense of the Marvell estate, and the liberal allowance that went with the personal guardianship—and would cease with it—had been available to the last penny for dress. Hence those court representations of Joan's expensiveness, newspaper sensations of their day. It was twelve-year-old Miss Marvell whose dignity required the latest Rolls-Royce, two limousines, several saddle horses, and three establishments. Virginia's expenditures had court sanction, yet the fact remained that Joan had scarcely visited the beautiful, retired place in Connecticut, and till this year had been in New York only overnight, between school and the Adirondack camp where she had spent her summers; had till this year scarcely ridden in one of the cars, mounted no horse except the mountain-bred mare that could climb forest trails like a cat!

Virginia faced comparative penury when her niece should marry. She spoke and behaved always as though houses and cars were hers and Joan merely her guest, and it is possible that the girl herself was more than a little confused on the point of the ownership, but a husband would be sure to inform

both himself and her. With the practical Saldagno Mrs. Bruce could have made a bargain, some dignified arrangement that would have left her to all intents and purposes mistress of the two houses in which she felt at home; of course, with the understanding that when the Saldagnos wanted either—but they would have lived for the most part in Italy—she would withdraw temporarily to the other. Marriage with an American meant that the guardian was simply frozen out; she had nothing to contribute to a bargain, for Joan bestowed herself. That the man should be Paul Breckinridge was merely the personal insult added to the injury.

Five years before Breckinridge had been entirely sure that he was going to marry the beautiful widow, and Virginia for a while had rather thought so herself. She had been more in love than she had ever been before, and it had seemed, then, that he was certain of a novelist's fame. That he had failed to win it, that, indeed, the lode had apparently been worked out with the one novel and the short stories that had been collected into a companion volume, was her complete justification for having, after a winter of vacillation, given him up. The prospect that had finally tempted her away was a magnificent one, the Higgins' money—a treasure beside which Joan's possessions were barely respectable.

It was one of those pieces of bad luck that cannot be foreseen or guarded against, that Joshua Higgins was killed in a railroad accident two weeks before the wedding day. If it had only been two weeks after it!—as might so easily have been the case. He had not even altered his will, which had been made before he met Virginia. Simone Lemerrier, the Lathrops, and others had found something peculiarly gratifying in this development, but to Mrs. Bruce fate's reprisal had appeared crudely trite; she had resented it fiercely and,

2—Ains.

with obscure logic, charged it up, somehow, against Paul Breckinridge.

"She's detestable to you!" Joan declared angrily, for as the weeks of their engagement went by Virginia did not soften her manner. "I can't think why!"

"She thinks I'm not good enough for you," Paul suggested conventionally. "I dare say she's quite right."

"Oh, what nonsense!" the girl scoffed.

Simone had congratulated him tearfully, the Lathrops and other friends had showed unclouded delight in his engagement. They all felt that the insignificant chit, Joan, received more than she gave in this marriage, and that the material provision which it offered Paul was more than offset by his now certain future distinction. They believed fervently that the world owes its artists a living. And they counted on the girl's obvious adoration to win him away from unprofitable yearnings after his evil enchantress. The engagement seemed to all of them the happiest thing imaginable, and he knew that he could not look to them for help in breaking it off.

Yet Paul had no wish to go on with it. He conceived various ways of disenchanting Joan; he might get drunk and present himself before her in that condition—he might leave love letters from other women, which he would write himself for the purpose, in her way. But he could not bring himself to offer her a gross insult or to break the habit of years that was a necessary preliminary, and he knew that she was far too well brought up to read letters that were not her own. He might write her an anonymous letter, defaming himself. She had never seen his handwriting, as it happened—the telephone was so much quicker—so he need not even take pains to disguise it!

But Joan destroyed the letter promptly, as he had known all along,

in his heart, she would, and did not even speak to him about it.

They motored over to Southampton one spring-day, and lunched on the sands together. It was a great advantage, Joan found, to have a fiancé so free from any demands of business as was Paul. He was at her service at any hour she liked to call him up, and only the demands on her own time—not few, with the assembling of a trousseau in progress—had to be considered.

"I'm glad you're a writer," she said, as he lit her cigarette after the meal.

A mad inspiration came to him, and he asked her daskly:

"Did you never wonder why I've written only one book?"

"Oh, but you will write other books, even more beautiful books!" she assured him buoyantly. "Paul, dearest, I'm so hoping I shall be able to inspire you!"

He dashed on:

"I've been fighting with myself—I've decided I must tell you, after what you said about my writing. You think you're marrying a clever fellow, a bit of a genius—and it's not fair to you. Listen, Joan! A pal of mine helped me; the idea was his—it was really his book, not mine! What do you think of me now?" He looked at her hopefully.

"Why, Paul, I don't *believe* it!" she cried in puzzled distress.

"But I'm telling you it's true. Joan, tell me if this alters your feeling for me—I want the truth."

Her face quivered.

"I'm sorry, of course. I was so proud of you. You can't think how I loved 'The Stalemate.' I've read it, oh, a hundred times! But, Paul, I was trying to think of something you could do that would make me—stop loving you. No, there's nothing. If every one in the whole world condemned you, if you did the awfulest things, got

drunk and beat me, I should go on loving you just the same!"

"You poor child, do forgive me," he begged, overcome with embarrassment and remorse. "It isn't true—I made it up to see what you'd say. Of course, I wrote the bally thing, and nothing to be proud of at that. I never guessed you liked it so much—it's rather sweet of you!"

His attempt to save himself ended by tightening the noose, and her appreciation, little though he valued her judgment, helped to reconcile him to the inevitable.

"I'm in for it," he decided. "Life's going to be a masquerade party for me, and I'm going as Romeo. I can never act natural, while she's around, for as long as we both shall live. Quite a contract, but it's up to me to try to swing it!"

CHAPTER VI.

Having abandoned all hope of staying it off, Paul found his wedding day upon him at the end of a few rushing weeks.

His long list of guests, being added to Virginia's longer one, had resulted in a throng of people, smart and distinguished, of different worlds, yet worlds whose orbits touched; even the many big rooms of the country house were crowded. It was late May, the roses at their best, and the whole setting perfect for the sort of ceremony on whose prettiness everybody comments, under a clear, high sky, its blue softened about the horizon by flocks of little mauve-shadowed clouds.

Joan looked flushed and constrained in her white satin and the lace veil that Simone longed to redrape. The bridesmaids wore pink and blue and were a pretty enough group. But Mrs. Bruce!

"Conscienceless, ruthless!" Simone muttered between her teeth. "Brazen!"

Virginia, in the vulgar phrase, had permitted herself to outshine the bride.

It was so easy for her to do this that there was something shabby in her willingness to take such a victory. Not even in girlish freshness might Joan keep the palm, for Virginia's cheek was insolently smooth, the corners of her eyes, thanks to constant vigilance, as unwrinkled as a baby's, the under side of her chin, the meeting of jaw and throat, triumphantly suave. She had dressed herself in gray, a chaperon's choice for color, unexceptionable for the bride's aunt, but of it and her hair she made gold and silver, a monopoly of soft brilliances that made Joan's white seem dull and flat. The girl was ill at ease in her long train, under so many eyes, and stumbled over the light unevenness of the turf, awkward, too, with the emotions of the day. Virginia moved like a bird, like a leaf on a breeze, a yacht under sail, like all things sure and graceful, as she circled among the guests, holding the reins of the whole social occasion with expert, imperceptible handling.

Paul resented her, and was profoundly conscious of her at each moment of the long ordeal that, even more than for most men, this formal wedding was to him. His part demanded gravity, a good bearing, silence except for the few appointed words. He behaved correctly, but there were wild thoughts surging through him as he walked and knelt and rose.

He was remembering with a terrible distinctness, a distinctness not achieved for years, certain moments and hours of the past. The time when she had played to him after the opera, until he had torn her hands from the keys, and sitting on the bench beside her, held her close and kissed her till the last candle flickered out, leaving the vision of her white face for a moment printed on the dark. The time she had let him drive her into town from this house through the summer dusk and starlit night—

He was promising to love only the girl beside him. What a farce! It would cause him not the smallest distress to say good-by to Joan Marvell—no, great Scott! Joan *Breckinridge*—at this moment, with the knowledge that he was never to lay eyes on her again. And Virginia—God, how he hated Virginia!

The thing was done, and there were congratulations and food and talk. Presently Joan disappeared, and Paul, as always in the excitement of a crowd, was being entertaining, charming all the people who did not already know and like him—a fit vis-à-vis for the radiant Virginia.

"That Marvell girl has done awfully well for herself!" was more than once said out of his hearing. "He's one of the most attractive men I ever met. Of course, one can't help suspecting that he wouldn't have been interested if she hadn't had half a million a year, or thereabouts, but you can't have everything. Isn't Virginia Bruce a vision? Would anybody believe she was a day over twenty-five?"

Joan came down in light-blue cloth for going away; the color made her look positively swarthy. There was the business of getting the pair off in their car—shoes, rice and the like, and shouted farewells and good wishes. No one knew where they were going. The car purred majestically away.

"Oh, Paul, I'm so happy!" Joan turned swimming eyes to the man who was now her husband.

"It's a relief to have that over, isn't it? A kiss, please, Mrs. Breckinridge!" he conceded, and having kissed her—he kissed her always as a child is kissed, but Joan had no experience of another variety—he held her gloved hand as he chatted about trivial incidents of the wedding. "I'm mighty glad it's over. I don't suppose any man that ever lived enjoyed the actual ceremony of getting married. It's the woman's triumph; she

shows her captive to her friends, and illustrates how much she can make him stand for. Oh, we're ready enough to go through with it to get you! But don't expect the victim to pretend to like it—I say!"

Joan clutched him; she did not scream.

It was not the fault of their chauffeur. The car had swung into the broad automobile highway with all correct precaution, but the great racing car that was upon them was far exceeding the speed limit and swerving carelessly to the wrong side of the road. Bates did the only thing possible, turning with all sharpness to avoid the encounter, but there was a grinding shock and a sharp lurch as two rear wheels collided. No serious damage was done and no one was hurt, but the car was put out of commission.

"You're sure you're all right, Joan?"

It took time to make certain that she was not even bruised, and that Paul's hand, cut by glass from a broken window, needed only a handkerchief tied around it. Then he stood hesitantly in the road, and said pleasantly:

"Curse the luck! I'm afraid now we can't make that train!"

"Oh, dear! Couldn't we walk?"

"What about the bags? Bates and I can't pack them two miles—cruelty to animals. No; we'll have to go back—on foot—and start all over again in another car."

"I don't believe," said Joan, considering, "that there is another before midnight. Goodness! What'll we do?"

"Drive there," he suggested, but their destination was too distant for that.

"No—we'll have to go back. It does seem futile—an anticlimax. Anyhow, let's walk slowly, and perhaps the people will be gone by the time we turn up. There's a train back to town that they'll all take—otherwise it would seem less ignominious to go by that. Well—I dare say it will be all right.

Somebody can telephone and reserve a drawing-room on the midnight. It's tiresome, but I can't seem to mind anything much—to-day!"

"You're a good sport," said Paul approvingly.

They walked back slowly by wood roads that he had learned five years before. The tops of the trees were golden in the late sunlight, and there were young ferns underfoot, giving out clean, cool fragrances. Paul took off his hat and Joan followed his example, and he descended a ravine to get a drink for her in a little silver cup he carried, and once they sat on a fallen log for a half hour's rest.

"It's a nice wedding journey," she said contentedly. "Why didn't we make it a walking trip?"

He looked at her in surprise. Would she be game for that sort of thing, he wondered? He had a sudden vision of shared, adventurous travel, of money not used for smothering luxuries, but to make impossible dreams come true. Joan, if she would, could finance exploring expeditions into Central Asia or the dark continent, and on such a scale of abundance and provision against emergency that she might accompany her party.

"Would you like it?" he asked, having sketched the possibilities as he saw them.

"Could we do that? Oh, how nice it is to be married—to be married, that is, to you! I've never had much money to spend, you see—Aunt Virginia managed everything. I never thought of my being able to do such things!"

They walked on, glimpsing a future more colorful and beckoning than Paul had contemplated. It was his fervent desire to make the best of his marriage, and he stressed his young wife's good points to himself and admonished his heart to love her. Of course, he was going to love her; why shouldn't he? She was awkward in

society, but at ease with him, and she had been so well brought up that she had none of those small personal bad habits that irritate and get on the nerves of others. If she was not conspicuously graceful, still they had taught her at that school of hers not to sprawl, and she neither yawned nor fidgeted—he enumerated all these negative virtues to himself desperately, not seeing the humor of them as recommendations to a husband's affection. She was fresh and wholesome and, he assumed, amiable—intelligent enough, affectionate, a good sport.

They were at the gates of Sevenoaks now, and in a couch hammock under the great shade trees, quite near, alone after the tiring day, lay Virginia, her hair bright against silken cushions, in one of her consummate poses.

CHAPTER VII.

Joan and Paul sat in porch chairs, grouped about the hammock on the grass, and some sort of conversation was successfully sustained among the three until Virginia said that she must go in and dress for dinner. Joan, whose clothes were all in trunks and bags waiting at the station, could not change, and Mrs. Bruce did not offer to lend her anything.

It was Paul who suffered in the anomalous situation. Dinner was an ordeal, with its candle flames showing him on the one hand the girl, her brown eyes embarrassingly expressive whenever they met his own—on the other the woman in maize georgette, her arms and shoulders pearl-smooth, pearl-white, and something mocking and provocative in her cool glances. Her beautiful face dazzled him, the whole vision of her was a shimmering radiance against shadows, and the man looked away from her like a monk, and told himself to look at Joan like a bridegroom. But he was conscious every

moment of the picture that Virginia made across the table.

"It's rather absurd to have a newly married pair on one's hands like this!" Mrs. Bruce repeated, as they got up from the table at last. "I can imagine how you two must be suffering! You are dying to be alone together, of course! Please don't mind me. Go out in the garden and hold hands."

"The only alternative seems to be dummy bridge!" Joan remarked. The shadowed garden was calling her.

"Unless you'd like some music?" said the older woman carelessly.

She sauntered over to the piano and began to play. It was very deliberately done, in the full remembrance that music storms the emotions, defended though they may be. She was playing old, familiar things—Chopin, Schubert, the Träume of Wagner.

"We can listen outside," Paul said desperately.

Joan caught his hand and led the way, over the dew-wet grass, skirting flower borders along a box walk, to a bench at the farther end of a small oblong of water, a sheet of wan light hedged with the black shapes of trees. Some of the famous roses festooned near them, and the air was full of fragrance. The night was very still, and Virginia's music came to them clear and soft, like a lure from fairyland. Presently, as though afraid that her insistent intrusion into Joan's hour was not personal enough, she began to sing.

"Oh, isn't that lovely!" said the girl contentedly.

The arm that Paul had flung around his wife tightened. It was this child he had to hold to, this child whom he meant to love. But there was perspiration on his forehead as the rich silver of the distant voice, soft from Virginia's warm, white throat, rose and fell, swelled and whispered, not so very far away. Joan was the spar to which he clung through that Lorelei singing,

and if she had let him stay beside her, if she had not sent him indoors for a wrap—

"Take my coat, child; I'm not cold."

"I think you are, dear," she said anxiously. "You seem to be shivering, ever so little. Of course, it's chilly with the dew falling, and we're quite high here. Aunt Virginia will give you a scarf for me, a coat—anything!"

He went in.

There were candles on the piano and no other light, and Virginia turned her fair face to him as he entered the room, under the same illusioning, soft radiance that had tormented him at dinner.

"I beg your pardon," he said in a jerky staccato. "Joan's chilly—sent me in for a wrap. Can you—lend her something?"

"Of course!" she smiled.

But she did not move to find a garment or to ring for a servant to bring one. She continued to gaze at him, forcing him to contemplate her loveliness.

"Well, Paul, so this is the end!" she said softly at last. "We'd scarcely have believed it, four years ago, if we could have been shown ourselves as we stand to-night, could we? You, happily married to what was then a toothy little horror at school, and I—the old aunt on the shelf!"

"You—that!"

"Oh, yes, I recognize my rôle. But there are one or two things I've always wanted to ask you, Paul—and I'll never have a better chance, shall I? We must both forget, absolutely, from to-night, that we ever—that there was ever—It's our duty to Joan!" She stressed the word "duty," knowing that no word is so uncompromisingly inimical to love.

"But I've wanted to know how long it was, really, before you stopped caring? You said, you remember, that I'd hurt you mortally, that it was no wound that could heal, but an amputation of

something that could never grow again. How splendid it is to see that disproved, and you so happily in love! You don't know how I blamed myself, Paul, how absurdly serious I was, not perceiving that that was merely—a speech! Who was it who said that we're always prone to exaggerate the passion we've inspired? You weren't unhappy, you weren't lonesome and aching—long? Tell me!"

She had drawn him over to her, as she could always draw men, though Paul had resolved that he would stand in the doorway to ask for the wrap and would depart with it at once. He found himself, against his will, quite near her, leaning on the end of the piano, staring like a hypnotized man at her flower-like, forgotten face. Somewhere there was a memory of another hour like this—a piano, candle flames, Virginia's face.

"A-agh! As though you didn't know I'm aching now!" He gripped a square projection of the instrument to save himself from bridging the few feet that were still between them. It is always possible for a man to refrain from familiarities with a woman, however worshiped, whatever his opportunities, as long as the relations between them have been formal. But the reestablishment of formal terms between those who have been lovers must always be on an insecure foundation. His arms knew their way so well around Virginia, he had kissed her delicate red lips and her eyelids and her white throat so often, un-reproached! There were no invisible barriers to daunt him, and no help except from within himself.

"You can't mean—you *still* care?" She leaned closer to him. He was really extremely attractive, and she had grudged him bitterly to Joan that afternoon. Of course, she had never consciously planned to make trouble between them, but she had been amused and certainly not displeased at dinner

by his manner that she found quite easy to read. Joan, of course, had not told her aunt that it was she who had proposed marriage to Paul, but Mrs. Bruce thought too slightly of the girl to have credited him with any motives but mercenary ones. She felt quite sure that he was not in love with his bride, but she had not been at all sure, until dinner, that her own power over him was still almost as great as ever. She hated to relinquish power, and she liked an emotional interlude from time to time. She quite wanted Paul to kiss her, now that she had played herself into a melting mood, and he stood so near, and she knew so well how to make him do it.

The silver candlestick between them fell to the floor in the brusque movement that he made toward her. But the other still burned, its flame going straight upward, a single tiny light in the gloom-filled room.

CHAPTER VIII.

Joan shivered on the brink of the oblong of water, which had grown black and filled itself with stars. It seemed to her that Paul had been gone for ages, but she knew that her estimate of time was quite undependable where he was concerned, since when he was with her she could never believe that hours had passed and not minutes, and to-day particularly she was in an abnormal state, between excitement, happiness, and fatigue. She decided to look at her watch, and wait until five minutes later by it. Then, whether the former interval had been long or short, she would know that there had been plenty of time for the fetching of a wrap, and if he had not returned she would go in to see what was detaining him.

The five minutes passed, and she got up a little stiffly and made her way back to the house. There was no more music now, and no sounds at all as she

entered the hall by the open door and looked about her. There was a very faint glimmer from the music room.

Joan entered it lightly, over floors rather thickly scattered with rugs. Her pupils were wide from the hour in the dim garden, and the single candle on the piano gave her all the light she needed to see her aunt in Paul's arms.

"Oh!" she cried sharply, unable to realize, all at once, the meaning of what was unmistakable enough.

Her voice was the first intimation they had of her presence. Paul's arms fell away from Virginia's shoulders, he sighed, and straightened himself to face the figure in the doorway. Virginia's immemorial reaction was to raise hovering fingers to her hair. Neither, for the moment, found anything to say.

"I wish somebody'd explain!" Joan cried, while with each second intolerable certainties sank home, past need of explanations. Hadn't all the men, always, been Virginia's? Why should Paul be any exception?

"Joan, I—" He tried to speak.

A great wave of rage swept over the girl. Always, in strong emotion, when many women are unable to give expression to their feelings at all, because of the pressure of inconvenient tears, she found inhibitions swept away and the words she wanted at her command. It is doubtful which disposition works most to its owner's disadvantage, since Joan always said what she had later to regret. She cried angrily now:

"You were kissing Aunt Virginia—we might as well face the truth, if it is so vulgar as to be almost inconceivable—I saw you. I withdraw what I said about explanations—there couldn't be any—the situation's utterly simple. But I can tell you this, Paul Breckinridge, that you and I part right here. I—I used to think I could forgive you anything—I said so, do you remember? That was if you'd loved me. I seem

to be the victim of a sort of bad joke. I wish you'd go away, both of you, out of my house. I'll never willingly see either of you again!"

Virginia had been tapping the floor uncomfortably with one foot. Now she raised startled eyes.

"Don't be absurd, Joan—don't attach too much importance to what really has very little! I'm to blame, not Paul. He used to like me quite a bit a long time ago, and just for fun—it was very wrong of me, of course—I made him kiss me. Be sensible, forgive him, take him away. He means to make you an excellent husband."

Paul made the crass mistake of taking up her words. He ventured to approach his wife.

"Joan, God knows I do. Please forgive me—dear!" He touched her shoulder humbly.

She recoiled, flashing a look at him that was like bared steel.

"I hate you! I hate you!" Her voice rose to a shrill note. "And, Aunt Virginia—I don't think it would be very safe for you to stay on here with me. I might— You don't seem to realize that you've taken everything from me—everything!"

"No, Joan! No!" Paul stood helpless between the two women.

Mrs. Bruce smiled her most insolent smile in the face of the girl's frenzy.

"You showed me your capacity for melodrama once before, Joan, but really you're outdoing yourself this time! If I hadn't told you certain things myself, I should believe you were honestly outraged—by what you must have known you had to expect. Didn't I tell you a few months ago that you would be married for your money or not at all?"

"But—this is *Paul*!" Joan defended herself stammeringly.

"Paul, yes!" Mrs. Bruce mocked.

"Paul is a singularly attractive man, let me tell you, and has been in the way

of having love passages with women who knew what they were about. Why, you, you little, ridiculous schoolgirl, you—without knowledge of how to dress or move or talk, without experience to teach you how to handle a man, what mortal thing do you suppose would draw a man like Paul to your feet, except the willingness to share your money? You've nothing else to offer. You——"

"Oh, be still, Virginia!" Paul interposed hoarsely. "That's not true. Joan, I swear to you that that's not true."

"Of course it's true," said the girl, suddenly calm, and an ugly, small smile touched her drawn lips. "As Aunt Virginia says, it's the one explanation that fits the facts of the case."

"Every one knows it's true, too," Virginia went on, and with her left hand she began to strum some chords on the piano, simulating composure. "Simone Lemercier admitted as much to me. She and that Lathrop woman planned to make the match, threw you two together. The whole thing was as much an arranged affair as any European marriage, where the man pretends a little devotion during the engagement, just for the looks of the thing. If the girl's deceived, so much the better!"

"Well, the girl was deceived," Joan said coldly. "But her eyes are open now. I've made a very pitiful fool of myself. But I wish I had words"—she turned on Paul again—"to tell you how utterly I despise you! You fell in with this scheme, you've lied to me a hundred times a day, and you couldn't even—you couldn't even keep for twelve hours to the cheating bargain you made!"

"You seem to have forgotten," he said, angry, at last, in his turn, "the circumstances in which we became engaged!"

"And you can remind me of them!"

"I insist that you remember them!"

I didn't want your damned money. I misbehaved just now, but, after all, what's a kiss? You can punish me for that, but it's not an unforgivable offense. It's not grounds for railing at me like a fishwife."

The sound of a motor driving up to the front door made Paul hesitate and break his sentence in the middle. None of them had had any idea that it had grown so late. But a servant appeared the next moment on the threshold to say, "The car is here, ma'am."

"Will you go up and get ready?" demanded Paul, his eyes hot on his wife's sullen face.

"I am not coming."

He brushed past her into the hall without leave-taking, caught up his own light coat, gloves, and hat, and strode out to the waiting car.

CHAPTER IX.

At the railway station Paul did not take the train that Joan and he had planned to take, but another, leaving fifteen minutes later, for New York.

He was glad to sit in the smoker and feel the swift miles hurled between him and the two women at Sevenoaks; it seemed to him that he had regained freedom, and was his own man once more. It was nearly three before he reached town, but the idea of going back to his rooms and to bed there scarcely presented itself; rest was unthinkable; it was distraction that he wanted.

Paul knew where to find this. Frances Lathrop had deplored certain associates and pastimes of his, which were, nevertheless, almost inevitably present in his idle, purposeless life. For years he had scarcely worked, and he could not fill all his days with intellectual discussion and argument, impassioned talker though he was. He had naturally gravitated to the society of men who, having no inner resources,

amuse themselves with contests of manual skill or chance. Paul had misspent five years in becoming an excellent billiard player, a really formidable antagonist at bridge, but at the national game of poker, in which luck remains the most important factor, he had never had much success. Yet something in him liked its banal excitement, its naive pitting of impassivity against the simulation of confidence in a contest—above all, the primal thrill present in all forms of gambling.

The room he entered now was blue with cigarette smoke, full of men in shirt sleeves, utterly and indescribably at their ease. Good fellowship pervaded it, and a reckless unconcern over losses, a gentlemanly indifference to gains, kept the atmosphere genial. Loud laughter, rough voices, welcomed Paul and poulticed his torn nerves as no feminine sympathy could have done just then. He dropped into a world in which women were not, and some one poured him out a stiff drink.

These men were utterly outside his real life; they did not know that he had been married that day, and they asked no inconvenient questions.

"How many cards, Breck?"

Paul picked up the hand dealt him, and found that it contained four small clubs and a diamond. On the rare occasions when he had succeeded in filling a flush in the past, it had inevitably occurred that the other players threw down their cards and he had won the ante merely, yet he had never learned to pass the improbable chance, expensive though the draw might be. Now he discarded his diamond automatically, and to his surprise took up a fifth club. Three aces were held against him, and the betting ran up. The chips that were pushed over to him at the show-down represented a respectable little sum, had he stopped to estimate it.

There is no convincing your poker player that luck is an invention. Paul

had had the double-faced deity's scowling countenance turned to him through many nights, and now he was to be treated, it appeared, with unfamiliar smiles. He picked up one promising hand after another, court cards in pairs attracted a third and even a fourth in the drawing, low cards fluttered in, in pairs, to fill his houses or in sequences to form straights, and when his cards were indifferent they were still better than those held by the other players.

"You're in bad, young man," said the chief loser uproariously. "It'll take all the diamond necklaces that pile will buy to put you straight with that baby!"

Lucky at cards, unlucky in love. It was too true to be funny.

In spite of the excitement of winning, the nervous and emotional strain of the day and the night began to tell on Paul, as the hours passed. A feeling of exhaustion assailed him, and presently a vast, unconquerable sleepiness.

"I hate to have you fellows think me a poor sport," he apologized, when day had come, but for the rest of the party no diminution of interest, it appeared, in the game. "I'm so dog-goned sleepy I simply can't stick it out any longer. Give me my millions, and let me go!"

He cashed in, to his stupefaction, for a little over fourteen hundred dollars, and went down, heavy-eyed, to the sunny street. He felt stale and, while certainly not drunk, stodgy with over-many drinks, and after a minute's hesitation he turned, not home, but toward his favorite Turkish bath. Baked, steamed, scrubbed, cold-sprayed, he fell into a child's slumber under the hands of his masseur, and it was three o'clock of the afternoon before he opened his eyes. Then he sat bolt upright on the leather couch, all his devils chased out of him, and remembered.

There was just time to catch the fourteen to the little station serving Seven-oaks, and he made it without pausing

to consider what he should say to Joan or what welcome he might expect from her. So strong was his compunction, so vigorously did he repudiate to-day his behavior of yesterday, that he felt confident of making her see that, in effect, the essential Paul had not kissed Virginia Bruce. He hated the woman, as a man might hate the liquor that will yet undo him if he watches its bright bubbles and sniffs its fragrance—surely he could make Joan understand that! He formed admirable plans for cherishing his young wife, devoting himself to her and winning her to forgetfulness of her inauspicious wedding day.

The house and grounds, under the sunshine of a day that was yesterday's twin, looked just as they had when he and Joan had walked back to them after the motor accident. But the couch hammock under the trees was empty. Paul went to the front door, rang, and demanded his wife.

"Miss Mar—ah, Mrs. Breckinridge left this morning, sir," said Holmes. He would make a good poker player, Paul thought freakishly, for certainly the abnormal procedures of the bride and groom must have been commented on by the servants, yet the man's face was a triumphant blank.

It was check, but it did not occur to Paul that checkmate was even threatened. He was forced to a move he had hoped to avoid, that was all.

"Mrs. Bruce is here?"

"Yes, sir."

Virginia came in almost at once, looking perturbed, but lovely.

"Where has Joan gone?" He would not even sit down.

"She wouldn't tell me. We didn't part on the best of terms, as you might guess!"

"I have to reach her—without delay."

"Really, I don't see that. She's free, white, and married, and if she wants to leave you, that's her affair. The

whole thing was a grisly mistake. She's quite right to call it off, in my opinion."

"I am quite sure you know where she is."

"I don't know—and I don't care! Can't we spare her, Paul—you and I?"

He ignored this. Certainly he was another man to-day from the weak wretch of last night. He was realizing rather poignantly, with his novelist's imagination, what must be the feelings of the young girl who had loved and trusted him to the point of telling her love, and whom he had insulted and betrayed. She had no one to go to, poor little Joan! She had poured out all her ended loneliness to him one day, and he knew that this utterly selfish woman before him, caring only for men, cold as a stone to one of her own sex, was the only relative she had on earth, while her friends were few and lightly attached.

"Do you mean to say," he demanded, "that she left no address, no message, nothing?"

"Oh, dear me, yes!" said Virginia, too tired herself, after the stormy scene of the day before, to do anything but acquiesce in her defeat. "There was a letter. I'll get it for you."

He snatched it, walked as far away from her as the length of the room permitted, and tore open the envelope. His tongue clicked in consternation against the roof of his mouth at sight of the few wavering lines, evidence of a state of mind bordering on hysteria in the writer; the big, staggering letters must have been formed by a hand that shook almost too much to hold the pen. She had not had occasion to write him before, but he could imagine the firm, schoolgirl neatness of the handwriting that would have expressed her fairly.

PAUL: I shan't see you again. You can marry her, or any one you like. I am going away. If you think you owe me anything, pay it by letting me alone.

I asked you—it was my fault. I see now that a girl shouldn't. If you want to marry anybody else—my lawyers will see about a divorce.

JOAN.

CHAPTER X.

All the good advice in the world, the exhortation, the prodding, could not have made Paul Breckinridge pull himself out of his lethargy of easy-going habits and buckle down to work. The events of forty-eight hours, however, in no way directed to that end, resulted in a sobered Paul turning to his neglected writing for solace.

He was forced to obey Joan, for the present, by not forcing himself upon her, since application to all possible sources for her address met with denial of knowledge or, in the case of her lawyers, with the plain statement that she wished her whereabouts kept a secret. Convinced by this that she had meant what she had written, he conceived that the least he could do would be to acquiesce in her decision. The whole thing, after all, had been a miserable mistake, and much as he longed to comfort her, he felt a wretched doubt of his power to do so. She had been hurt by the truth, and only time can heal that wound.

What was the use of putting on the Romeo mask again, when he had been caught once without it?

To stay in New York, to take up the old life where he had dropped it, meant meeting the Lathrops, Simone Lemerrier, and all the others, and Paul shrank morbidly from facing these people who knew of his marriage, and whose eyes must speculate, even though their curiosity remained unspoken. He wanted to go away, and he discovered in himself, also, a willingness to show Joan that he could achieve distinction and a competency, if not wealth like hers, on his own account. His resolve crystallized swiftly.

He remembered a mountain village in

New Hampshire, through which he had once tramped, and which had struck him then as an ideal place for a writer. There were no distractions, not even Saturday-night movies, living was admirably cheap, and the long, priceless silences were scarcely ever broken by the horn of an adventuring touring car. Paul found satisfying board at a farmhouse and took for his private use a stoutly built shed, which he furnished in the picturesque manner of the artists' colonies at Provincetown and Woodstock—a wide couch heaped with pillows in a pleasant clash of colors, a good rug, an improvised bookcase, candlesticks, jugs, ash trays in brass and pewter, and as mark of his special calling, a square, workmanlike writing table, its drawers full of paper and a typewriter upside down under the broad top, summonable at will by a light pressure.

The wide door framed a ripple of violet hills, the nearer slopes covered with beech and oak and maple and a sprinkling of white birch, and a meadow that, on Paul's arrival, was yellow with dandelions.

He had good hours there, of work and rest and of musing, hours when satisfying thunderstorms raged and he could not write for the fascination of the open doorway; other hours when mist filled the valley and his outlook was a blank square, driving him in on himself so that he wrote his best. He had been so long a man about town that he had half forgotten the delights of the country, which he found again now in long tramps after his work for the day was done.

There were half a dozen excellent plots for short stories that had occurred to Paul in the past year, tempting him to consider different ways of handling them, but not to set pen to paper. He wrote these now, and wondered why he had allowed them to remain so long unwritten. He had no need to think

of money for a year to come, for short stories came very easily from his pen and sold without difficulty. Editors, it seemed, had not forgotten Paul Breckinridge.

It was natural that his thoughts should play about his own problem. There was pain, but the artist's mysterious healing, too, in that consideration of it as the material of art. For the book that he began to write when the short stories were out of the way, he could choose no other subject, but he altered it, of course, in this detail and in that, so that the similarity should seem no more than accidental, and he wrote with all sympathy from the woman's point of view. Nevertheless, he had not reached Chapter Three before he had decided that the book must appear under an assumed name.

It was quite different from his other work, which had had a youthful tendency to the stark and ruthless, and it was unlikely that his hand would be detected. He worked in the hope that critics would ascribe the new book to a woman, and chose initials for his *nom de plume*, to that end. Certain passages of it constituted, in effect, a letter to Joan, and there was perhaps one chance in three that she might read it, while had he published it under his own name she would have been practically certain to read it. But then every one who knew them both could have intercepted his message, and understood its meaning, also.

"Money Changers" was finished by the following spring and appeared among the fall books of that year. Though it had no benefit from its author's former success, it was widely read and much discussed from the first. Paul got numbers of letters about it, letters from women almost invariably, and was rather surprised to learn how many women there were who had more money than their husbands, and found life embittered by the fact.

A screen star wrote that she had been happy till her salary shot skyward, and would gladly live on her husband's two hundred a month, but she could not give up her art!

For the most part the letters did not prompt him to make any response, and when they begged for a reply he wrote perfunctorily, resenting the demand on his time. But once in a while the communications interested him. And one day when he had nothing to do, finding two sheets filled with exquisitely legible handwriting, he read them carefully, stretched on his couch with cigarettes at hand.

I have just finished reading your book, "Money Changers," and I have such a strong impulse to write to you that I am sitting down to do so, though there is no reason why you should be interested in anything that I have to say. May I begin by telling you that I am quite sure you are a man?—although many people do not agree with me. It is not that you have not described a girl's feelings perfectly, because what I have been asking myself is how any man could get inside a girl's skin as you seem to have done, to understand so well! And still I think you are a man!

It is odd how nearly, in your book, you have described my own situation—it seems as though you must, in some way, have heard my story.

Paul grinned over this sentence; it occurred in every such letter he received. Did they never realize that there are one hundred and ten million men and women in these United States, and that every conceivable situation must exist by the hundred thousand?

To you, an utter stranger—and I shall not sign my own name—I don't mind saying that I loved this man very, very much, and that, although there was no possible doubt of his motives in pretending to love me, I have not been able to forget him. So you will understand that it is an unhappy woman who writes you. And that I am grateful to you because, in your book, you somehow make out a case for your man, while never minimizing the unbearable humiliation of the woman's position.

It is true, as you say, that a man's great

possessions don't embitter his marriage with a poor girl—and you ascribe this to the greater generosity of his nature! That's why I think you are a man—I have just realized that it was this passage that decided me. Don't you see that this only argues his greater vanity? And that the real test of generosity is in the receiving, not the giving, of material things?

Don't trouble to answer this, unless you wish to confuse me—or try to! But in that case, address your letter to M. Hayes —

A New York street and number followed.

The point raised by his unknown correspondent rather piqued Paul, who hadn't thought of it. It was quite true that, had he been possessed of millions, he would have married Virginia Bruce—who would in that case unquestionably have married him—and been happy in the fatuous belief, disproved by the actual event, that he was loved for himself alone!

He answered M. Hayes rather hotly, because her truth-barbed arrow had scratched, and had riposte from her a few days later, which left him even less willing to allow her the last word.

There is a certain quaint charm, as many people learned during the war, in such a bandying of letters with a complete stranger. Intimate revelations are easily made under cover of such utter darkness. It is like confessing to nobody. Yet echoes return out of the void, sympathy, challenge, even disbelief. A man's thoughts play inevitably, as he writes, about the personality of the mysterious woman who will read, and as he is always certain of beauty behind a veil, he pictures her as youthful, exquisite, lovely.

Paul had a sense of humor and of the probabilities, and sometimes grinned at the image he called up, assuring himself that M. Hayes was forty-five, fat, pop-eyed. Or perhaps she had peroxidized hair and used an impossible perfume. There were a thousand chances to one against her looking as he im-

aged her—young, elegant, wistful, raising serious eyes from the pages of his letters.

But, while he laughed at himself, their correspondence was fast becoming, after his work, the first interest of his life.

CHAPTER XI.

Breakfast in bed, formerly one of the pleasantest hours in the day for Virginia Bruce, was becoming a recurrent horror. The morning mail filled one of the side pockets of the wicker tray, and she found she had not the strength of mind to leave the dunning, threatening letters unopened while she ate. She had to know the worst at once, and the worst usually took away her appetite.

Some eighteen months after she had parted company with her niece the horrid side pocket proved to contain, one morning, four bills with the least suave of reminders penned across the foot of the page, a collector's letter threatening suit on the part of her dress-maker, and an insistent communication from the lawyers for the Marvell estate, practically ordering her out of the house she occupied. They had seized and sold the place in the country when she had come to town, and now, they wrote, Mrs. Breckinridge had directed them to sell the Park Avenue house as well. Mrs. Bruce had not responded to their previous letters on the subject. Their Mr. Whitehouse would wait on her that afternoon in order to make it quite plain that, having received an excellent offer for the premises, they were not empowered to leave her in further occupation.

"Oh, damn!" said Virginia, and swept the whole unpleasant flock of letters to the floor.

Then she reached for her hand mirror and examined her reflection closely. Money worries were leaving their marks; for all Louise's efforts there

was a little line between the carefully tended brows, two faint shadows from the nostrils halfway to the corners of the mouth. She turned the mirror face down.

She was nearly forty and nearly penniless, and there was no ready refuge of a second marriage at hand. It had seemed to little Joan Marvell that all men were in love with her beautiful aunt, but Virginia knew the exact practical value of their attentions. She had half a dozen hangers-on who, having clothes and telephones, a knowledge of bridge and dance steps, were able to wander in society's gardens, but she had never a man of solid wealth where she wanted him. Such men are generally nearing middle age, with a high opinion of themselves and a taste for girls in their teens; Virginia, on the other hand, was attracting younger and younger adorers each year, as she vexedly noticed—college boys on allowances, the subordinates of the business world. There was, of course, a constant sprinkling of young men who were rich by inheritance among her acquaintances, but luck, in these instances, had been against her. She held a bald-headed real-estate man from Peoria as a last resort. Every woman has some such reserve, distasteful, yet comforting to remember.

It was the arrival of the Peoria man's wedding invitation in the second mail that sent Virginia into a kind of panic. There was nothing for it now but to write to Joan and implore help. She did not want to humble herself, but she had no alternative. And her shallow optimism returned as she wrote the false phrases of regret and affection. Why should she not make it up with the girl, and regain all the advantages she had enjoyed during her minority?

There had been no communication between aunt and niece since the fiasco of the wedding, and Virginia was obliged to send her letter in care of the law-

yers for the estate. She had her answer before she had begun to expect it. Joan was at the Ritz, and would Aunt Virginia come at about three tomorrow—Wednesday. She was, sincerely, Joan Marvell Breckinridge.

A changed Joan, an uncertain Virginia, greeted each other at the appointed hour. There was an abortive attempt at effusiveness by Mrs. Bruce, soon quelled by the girl's cold, almost hostile manner.

"Let's be perfectly frank, Aunt Virginia! You are asking me, as I understand it, to give you quite a large sum of money. But why should I pay your debts? The little you did for me as a child was made well worth your while at the time. Do you think I owe you gratitude for taking away my husband?"

"Did you ask me to come here"—Virginia's temper overcame her prudence—"in order to say hateful things to me?"

"No!" Joan was lying back in a deep chair, quite at ease in the face of Virginia's agitation. "No—I have a proposition to make to you. But I want it understood from the start that you and I aren't friends and can't ever be friends. We might make a business arrangement—if it were to the advantage of both!"

"I suppose I might as well hear what you propose."

"I have a question to ask first. Aunt Virginia, I've traveled hard all these eighteen months. I've been up in Canada and out to Santa Barbara and down to Palm Beach. I've observed a little and read more and thought—a good deal. I'm not quite the ignorant child I was! And what I require of you before we go any further is the exact truth of your relations with Paul."

"We were engaged several years ago, and I broke it off," Virginia said succinctly. "I don't know what crowds you've been playing around with or

what sort of books you've been reading, but if you think Paul Breckinridge is the unconventional type of man, you've still a good deal to learn about life. I'm no angel myself, but what you saw between us was as much as there ever was to see."

Joan instinctively doubted every word that her aunt uttered, but she wanted to believe this so much that she accepted it. It happened to be the exact truth.

"You never played fair with me, Aunt Virginia. You didn't help me in any of the ways that a girl needs to be helped; you maneuvered so that I was left out of everything when I was with you—oh, I can see now how easy it was for you! If I talked you were so sarcastic about my poor little remarks afterward that I was too self-conscious to open my mouth the next time people were there, and if I didn't talk you made fun of me for being bashful. You did the pettiest things—you even bought me unbecoming clothes!"

"Well, then, what you were too ungenerous to give me I am offering to buy. You are a very fascinating woman, and you know all that I'm floundering about in ignorance of, all I might acquire, left to myself, by the time I'm forty. I'll pay these debts you speak of, I'll give you a reasonable allowance—if you'll choose for me the clothes you'd select if you were I, and coach me, *honestly*, in getting on with men. Now what have you to say?"

"I accept, of course!" said Mrs. Bruce. With Joan's words all the worries that had been aging her fell away, and she drew delicious, secure breaths. Oddly enough, she found herself respecting, for her very uncompromising antagonism, the girl she had always rather despised, and she even promised herself a certain novel enjoyment in teaching her the arts she so conspicuously lacked.

"It's quite true," she declared, "I

didn't give you your money's worth before. It will be rather fun dressing you—*pour le bon motif!* You have possibilities, you know—and you're thinner than you were, an advantage nowadays. But that frock is as bad as any atrocity I ever perpetrated. Come, let's get down to business. Dressmaker's appointments are the very first thing—after the corsetière. Are you quite free to-morrow morning?"

CHAPTER XII.

The Park Avenue house was not sold, after all, and Joan went back to her old rooms in it. Virginia, breakfasting once more with only pleasant letters in the pocket of her tray, regained serene spirits, and the relations between the two were far more friendly now that they had repudiated friendship than in the days when a normal family affection had been assumed to exist.

In the matter of clothes Mrs. Bruce magnificently fulfilled her side of the bargain. She studied conscientiously the long lines of Joan's narrow-backed figure, tried shade after shade of color after color against the girl's hair, against her skin, by daylight and by artificial light, and pored over costume designs for hours before she made her felicitous selections. She watched tirelessly while a hairdresser arranged Joan's hair in a dozen different ways, and she found a clever maid in the place of the faithful but untalented Peggy, who, however, was kept on to oversee the household linen. Celine caught the trick of the approved coiffure at once, and she had a lynx's eye for the details that complete a toilet. She knew the proper way to put on powder, so that it neither shows nor comes off, and she coaxed Joan to permit a butterfly dusting of rouge.

The result of all these ministrations was a reflected vision that sometimes blinked back in amazement to see itself

so pretty. Joan hadn't guessed what mysterious value certain combinations of taupe and burnt orange, dull browns and hennas, could give to skin and hair, or how the green circle of her eyes, between the pupil and the outer brown, could be made to gleam by the wearing of jade earrings. Virginia was teaching her to move gracefully, too, and there were hours with a private dancing teacher. Joan had had dancing lessons before, but now she was made to study as seriously as though the Russian ballet were her destination, and the intensity of her work brought its reward.

With a reversal of her former tactics that was as successful in its effect as her disparagement had been, Virginia praised her own successes.

"You're ravishing in that stage-moonlight blue!" she would exclaim. "I was afraid of that dress—but it's a howling success, isn't it, Celine?" And she admitted frankly, while Joan demurred modestly and agreed in her heart: "You had the essentials of a beauty all along—everything except the sense to see them and make them count. Being unhappy has been becoming to you, too—it is to lots of women. It gives you a wistful, serious look that appeals to men!"

There were hours when Joan shut herself in her room, to be alone with her new self and get to know her. She felt giddy and restless, not quite Joan Breckinridge, but a lighter-hearted person more easily moved to laughter. Virginia, absorbed in first principles, had not begun her lessons in the art of pleasing, yet the mere consciousness that she was beautiful had already cured her pupil's worst faults of manner.

Much of what Mrs. Bruce taught her when she reached the teaching stage is to be found in the back of any woman's magazine—the old exhortations to listen appreciatively if she couldn't talk, to show pleasure in any proposed diver-

sion, and the rest. More subtle were the directions given for the interesting, the handling, and the holding of men. Mrs. Bruce was working to earn her allowance, and she told Joan truths that she had won by experience.

Joan learned to marvel at the pitiful ineptitude of her own behavior with Paul. She learned the fatuity of her belief that love argues its own return—learned it, to the vindication of Virginia's coaching—from Dick Brennan, a few months after her return to live with her aunt.

That first exposition of her own power taught her more, indeed, than all the verbal lessons.

She learned from it that a woman may have millions, yet need be in no doubt whether she is or is not loved. Dick's symptoms were unmistakable and not to be counterfeited. There was bitterness in that, too, for she had had childish moments of hoping that, after all—in spite of everything—Paul had loved her, and she knew now quite certainly that he never had.

The relations between Joan and her aunt passed rapidly through the phase of armed truce, in which they worked as mutually respecting enemies for a common end, into a keener, undeclared hostility. Virginia had passed her fortieth birthday. Joan was coming into her own with a rush that could not be pleasing to the older woman, and her own, it appeared, was too often, now, what formerly had been Virginia's. Dick Brennan was not the only deserter from the old allegiance, and when the two went out together it was most often Joan who made conquest, now, of interesting strangers. It was not to be expected that Virginia should like this.

She began to make separate plans for herself, to beg off at the last moment from going out with Joan, on the plea of fatigue or headache, and when the girl was safely out of the house, to dress and go elsewhere. She

began to cultivate people she had been rather given to avoiding, rich and jovial social climbers and a solidly prosperous small group without social connections or ambitions, whom she had met superciliously in the days of the Peoria broker. She had to have a stage where she might hold the center, unaccompanied by a young Mrs. Breckinridge who grew prettier every day.

CHAPTER XMI.

On Joan's side her childish distrust of her aunt was being strengthened by each step she made in the knowledge of life. She knew that David Bruce's widow, since her own recollection began, had lived in an atmosphere of frivolous luxury, surrounded always by men whose devotion was no secret, her days a round of pleasure seeking and her most serious occupation the choice of her clothes.

"I'm no angel——" Virginia had said.

Joan wondered whether there might not be truth behind the light declaration, in a sense that should make her unwilling to go on living with her aunt. There were incidents of their old life together that now were not difficult to understand, so that she could only hope she remembered them wrongly. And she was really disquieted by Mrs. Bruce's manner sometimes, by a dilation of her pupils and an occasional excessive hilarity. There was no reason why they should not part company, now that the lessons were over, though she held herself bound to continue the payment of an allowance.

One evening Virginia trailed upstairs with the announced intention of going to bed, just as Joan was starting out to a dance.

"I believe she hates me!" thought the girl, interpreting easily enough the baleful look of the older woman at the brilliant picture she made. "Why should

I live with some one who hates me? I shall end this arrangement very soon."

Coming in toward two o'clock, and not feeling sleepy, she began to search for a book she had been reading in the library, and had just secured it when she heard a car stop at the door, and the low tones of a man's voice, just audible, before a peal of silver laughter drowned them. Then a latchkey grated in the lock and her aunt, alone, slipped in.

"Why, Virginia! I thought you went to bed early. Did anything happen?"

She was in her most magnificent and newest evening frock, the amende honorable of the dressmaker who had threatened suit, and the diamonds she was wearing belonged to Joan, whose eyebrows climbed as she recognized them. She looked haggard in spite of her high color, and her eyes swam under heavy lids.

"Really, I think you made a mistake to go out," Joan said sharply. "You don't look at all well to me. It must have been a very irresistible invitation—and an extremely sudden one!"

Virginia stood and laughed at her.

"It was quite, quite irresistible! And your lecturing me about it—has its funny side."

"How is that?"

"Well—at my time of life—and yours!" But her amusement seemed suddenly to have left her. She dropped into a carved, high-backed chair that was part of the formal furnishing of the hall, and stared dully before her.

"We aren't friends, you and I, Joan Breckinridge. It was you who said that first, but God knows it's true. This life is better than being dunned, but it isn't good enough, and, anyhow, it can't last. You'll divorce Paul and marry some day, and I shall be turned out of this house, after all. It's everybody for himself in this world."

"You needn't be afraid!" said Joan hotly. The mention of Paul, as al-

ways, spurred at her heart and set it galloping. She turned without further speech and went upstairs.

In the morning Virginia kept to her room and the girl idled about the house fighting depression.

Joan herself admitted that their association could be only temporary, but she was at a loss to know what to substitute for it. Life, to her, was something to be lived day by day, with as little thought as possible for a future that held no promise. She smiled bitterly at the suggestion that she might forget Paul and love another man, but there were men, she knew, of delicate perceptions and sympathy, who could give her the friendship and the intellectual companionship she had always missed. If such a man were a widower with two or three small children, and his heart in his wife's grave, how happily, she thought, they might fit their broken lives—together! It was the only possibility she could imagine that was not distasteful, unless—

Naturally she had not made her bargain with Virginia, had not bent all her energies to the lessons set her and won a success that was beyond her own expectations, without thoughts, dreams, of encountering Paul again somehow, somewhere, and forcing him to find her desirable. She wove little dramas of such meetings at night before she slept; he wouldn't recognize her at once, she was fond of fancying, and then he would know her with wonder, and she would hold him at arm's length and pretend for a long time that she had outgrown her childish infatuation for him. She would scoff at the luckless little Joan whom he had treated so badly, and commend his preference for Mrs. Bruce, on whose fascinations she would expand, with just the faintest stressing of the fact that she was forty. She wondered often if he knew that.

Frances Lathrop, whose husband was painting Joan's portrait, called up at

lunch time to make his excuses from the next day's sitting. Jack had the flu, she rather thought—anyhow, he had a fever, and she had put him to bed. And then she rambled on for ten minutes about this and that.

"I suppose you know that Paul's in town?" was the bit of news, couched as a question, that tumbled in at the last.

"I didn't know! Since when?" Joan caught her under lip between her teeth.

"Blew in on us yesterday afternoon. I hope to see you reconciled some day, you know, Joan. Jack says——"

"Then I won't come to-morrow," Joan interrupted hastily; she really couldn't listen to Frances' clumsy peacemaking. "Call me up when Jack wants to go on, will you? Good-by!"

The receiver was up at last, the instrument back on its table, and Joan sitting forward in her chair with her hands tightly gripped around her knees.

So that was where Virginia had been last night! Was it, could it have been, Paul's voice that she had heard outside the door? She remembered her aunt's strange manner, the things she had said, and what had begun as suspicion hardened to certainty.

"Your lecturing me—has its funny side!" "It's every one for himself in this world!"

For the second time Virginia had betrayed her.

She mounted to the second floor, interrupted a facial massage without ceremony, and sent Louise out of the room.

"Let her have those wet towels and sit up!" Joan ordered. "Here, put this thing over your shoulders. I have something to say to you, and I mean to say it now."

Virginia sat up, startled and angry, the cold cream glistening on her face.

"You've no business to take that tone with me!" she protested.

"Haven't I? Haven't I? You promised to play fair, and you've been cheat-

ing again—don't deny it, for I've found you out."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Mrs. Bruce said crossly. "You seem to be having one of your melodramatic fits—you missed your vocation, if you ask me. You should have gone barnstorming."

"Wasn't it Paul who came home with you last night?"

"Paul? What on earth do you mean? Paul Breckinridge? No, it certainly was not!"

"I can't trust you," Joan said doggedly. "He is in town, I know. You said something last night about my wanting a divorce, and I said you needn't be afraid. But if you and he are seeing each other again—perhaps it would be best. Anyhow, I have to know!"

"And how do you propose to find out? Since you won't accept my word!"

"I didn't come up here without having thought out a plan." Joan's manner was fairly calm now, but she was breathing irregularly and her eyes were bright and compelling. "You will write a note to Paul—in care of the Lathrops will reach him, if you want to pretend you don't know where he's staying!—and ask him to come to see you to-morrow night. Tell him I'll be safely out—no! He might have a poor little last scruple about this being my house. Ask him to come to see you at"—she hesitated a moment—"at Jack Lathrop's studio! He's sick, Frances will lend it to me, and you can tell Paul you borrowed it for a party that you've had to put off. It's a perfect place for a rendezvous, in that black street where not a soul passes after the painting light goes. I must see the note, and, Virginia, I shall see, too, that you don't have a chance to telephone him not to come!"

"I really, really, believe you're crazy!" said Virginia positively. "You

know, there is such a thing as a lunacy commission, as rich eccentrics have found out before now!"

"I don't care what you think, and you can't frighten me with a threat like that. We'll part company after this, no matter what happens; but first I mean to have the truth about you and Paul. Please write that note at once and show it to me when you've finished it. It does seem high-handed, I admit, Virginia—but I'm afraid you'll have to be locked up in your room until we start downtown together to-morrow night!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"And what are you going to do if he comes?" demanded Virginia suddenly and violently.

She sat on the edge of the big divan, under the single drop light that Joan had switched on, and smoked cigarette after cigarette while the minutes ticked away. The two women had been waiting less than half an hour, and had arrived well in advance of the hour named in the note to Paul, so that the tenseness of expectation had not begun to relax. At any moment there might be a man's step on the bare stairs outside, the fall of the brass knocker on the door.

Joan had gone over to the big north window and stood leaning against its glass panes, half hidden by the curtains, not at all likely to be noticed by any one entering the big, gloomy studio. That was part of her plan, no doubt, Virginia supposed—to surprise an affectionate greeting from her husband.

"What shall I do? Nothing sensational," Joan said quietly. "I shall know, that's all."

"You won't know anything of the kind! That's just what you don't seem to see, that Paul, having been interested in me once, will come at my summons to-night whether we met two nights ago or not. You're precipitating the

very thing you want to avoid. I've told you a dozen times I haven't laid eyes on the man since you did."

"He won't come," the girl explained wearily, "unless he wants to come. If you can still bring him—well, you can have him! And I seem to have to remind you once more that I don't accept a thing as true because you say it is."

Virginia lit a fresh cigarette.

"Well, this procedure is in your hands, but it's not the most honorable thing in the world, if you ask me—laying a trap for a man and hiding to see if he'll fall into it!"

"I haven't been very honorably treated myself, if you come to that, and I have to have the truth. Would you mind not talking? You are supposed to be waiting here for him alone."

They relapsed into silence.

An elevated train rumbled noisily a block away, automobiles chugged and honked, the sound of footsteps mounted from the pavement. Virginia yawned once or twice, just audibly in the stillness of the studio. Joan looked at her wrist watch, and saw that exactly four minutes had passed since she had last looked. Its hands seemed not to move at all, yet she was tired as after a long ordeal.

It was now ten minutes past the hour mentioned in Virginia's note, and there was a little satisfaction in the thought of that ten minutes' delay in answering her summons, even if that tall figure hurrying along below were his—no! He walked past, crossed the street, and turned the corner.

The minutes dragged on. He was a quarter of an hour late now, twenty minutes, half an hour. But then there are all sorts of small accidents to be reckoned with in cities—blocks in the subway, some new, ill-understood police experiment with the traffic. Joan's own car had got into a snarl the other night after the theater.

Virginia had now counted enough piled

up against her niece to be hoping, with wicked fervor, that Paul would come. Even though it meant the loss of Joan's support, her ready signature to checks for the expenses of a household run for another's advantage as much as hers. Perhaps, after all, she was not going to be dependent in the future, as in the abject present, upon Joan's checks—one never knew! Perhaps it was good that she had been held in duress for forty-eight hours; perhaps the breaking of that dinner engagement was the best card she could have played with the packing-house millionaire from Chicago, whose unequivocal wooing the other night had sent her home hysterically sure that the one last chance she had despaired of was hers. It was the card she would have played in the old days of superb and careless assurance, and how infallibly she had won then!

She had not seen Paul in more than two years, as she had truthfully said, but she hoped, she hoped—for the discomfiture of her niece—that he would come in answer to her note.

"It's twenty minutes past eleven!" said Joan suddenly out of the half darkness.

"I think I hear some one now," Virginia whispered.

CHAPTER XV.

When a man is exchanging letters with a woman he does not know, there comes inevitably a moment when he clamors for her photograph. Soldiers, advertising light-heartedly for correspondents, foresee this moment and add to their initial plea, "Photograph if possible!"

But Paul hadn't really cared at first what "M. Hayes" might look like. Her letters had interested him as frank expressions of a sensitive nature, and as her situation was similar to that of his heroine, discussing it with her was like talking to his own creation come to life.

They had threshed out, on paper, the whole vexing question of the rich woman who can't be sure she is loved for herself, and the man whose pride revolts against obligation; they had dissected his book, and it might have been thought that now the correspondence could be allowed to lapse. What else should strangers have to say to each other?

But this was the moment when curiosity about the unknown woman became tormenting. He wrote to beg for a photograph, and she replied:

But the charm of these letters, to me, has been just that we've written them as disembodied spirits, it has been like corresponding with some one in Mars, unconditioned by the things that influence, so much too much, the rest of our lives! You have cared about my thoughts, not about the way I do my hair. I would have liked it better if you hadn't known whether I was a woman or a man, rich or poor.

There was more in the same vein, about the advantages of a spiritual comradeship, but at the very end, enchanting to Paul in its feminine inconsistency, was the plea:

Besides, I haven't a photograph of myself that I really like.

He was encouraged by this to ask for a great deal more.

I thoroughly agree—the mystery has been delightful—a unique and charming experience. But nothing stays the same in this life, and that which does not develop into another phase, becomes stale and dry. Imagine that we've been at a masquerade, together, you and I, talking behind masks. Isn't the very point of a masquerade the expectation of the moment of unmasking?

Don't send me your picture then. Tell me instead, when and where I may come to see you.

To which she answered:

I'm so sorry you are getting bored. I hadn't guessed. Good-by!

Paul stared at the curt finality of this in horror, and at once returned a long letter of protestation and explanation; she had misunderstood him ut-

terly, and he was eager to write under the old conditions forever, if she would let him, but he must tell her that she had not succeeded in writing as a disembodied spirit, and that the fragrance of an adorable feminine personality had found its way into her envelopes.

He wandered on into further indiscretions, mailed the whole without re-reading, and then waited, over a painful number of days, for an answer that did not come. Could she really, he wondered, have meant that "good-by?" It wasn't in woman's psychology as he understood it, and he began to fit sad little interpretations to it, in alternation with stigmatizing her silence as a coquette's move to heighten interest. She might be terribly disfigured by some accident, and have valued this correspondence as her chance to meet a man on the old terms, without encountering pity or repulsion in his eyes. Or she might have lost the money she found a burden, and be poor and shabby. Or she had a jealous husband, and could flirt safely only on paper!

It was at this time that Paul had to run down to New York to see his publishers, but he left strict orders for the forwarding of all letters. In town, he looked up for the first time since his marriage his old friends, Simone Lemercier, the Lathrops, and others. He had dropped in again to ask how Jack's flu was developing, when Frances made a dart at her mantelpiece and exclaimed:

"Oh, before I forget it—a letter that came here for you!"

He recognized Virginia's decorative writing on the pale-gray envelope, stamped—he remembered her absurd affection—with a three-cent stamp for the harmony of its violet with her chosen paper, and pocketed it impassively. Back at his hotel he read it, and considered the invitation it contained, not without interest.

Joan had cut herself off from him ruthlessly; in the two years and more

since their marriage she had made not the slightest overture. Paul's great incentive to work, before the interest of the work itself caught and held him, had been the hope of building himself, not renown only, but a solid prosperity from which he might treat with his wife, not as one who has all to gain from a reconciliation. He was in danger of forgetting that now. Life was again pulsing with possibilities, and to devote it to the propitiation of a sulky young woman toward whom his chief feeling was one of compunction was a repellent prospect.

He remembered the flawless brilliance of Virginia's face behind the candle flames, and the lure of it tugged a little at certain heartstrings long sagged and loose. In reminiscent mood he lived over many old scenes with the amber-haired widow, and he took careful note of the hour she named, and the fact that chance had given her for that night the quietude of Jack Lathrop's downtown studio, where no one would ever mark their meeting.

He decided to go.

He was looking rather often at his watch, and giving only half attention to his evening paper, when a batch of forwarded letters was brought up to him. He shuffled half a dozen, with typewritten addresses mostly, to one side, and tore open eagerly one in a smallish, square envelope.

Very much later, when it was too late to think of going, Paul remembered that Virginia Bruce had been expecting him to come to her that night. There was no telephone in Lathrop's studio, so he sent a note by a messenger boy to apprise her that he was unable to come.

Then he returned to still another reading of "M. Hayes' " letter. He was almost sure, from the wording of it, that one more appeal from him would conquer her reluctance and win the permission he craved so unreasonably, per-

mission to call on her, to meet her face to face.

CHAPTER XVI.

Ten days later he found himself within a few minutes of the fulfillment of his desire.

It was quite absurd how intensely interested he felt in the revelation to come. He was thirty-six years old, married—though, to be sure, his marriage had counted for little—and a man whose heart had been devastated by an immensely accomplished practitioner many years ago. His apprenticeship was well behind him, and he now wrote knowingly about love and lovers. But he wondered if any sophomore, any simple soldier or sailor, ever waited for a woman with keener expectancy.

It had been arranged that the one who arrived first should sit at the corner table under the palm tree, which had been reserved in the name of Hayes, and wait for the arrival of the other. Paul had, of course, made it his affair to be first, and by ten minutes' margin. She was making it hers, it appeared, to be at least as late.

Some one was approaching at last—he had an impression of a big black hat, rich furs—no! She joined a group at a near-by table, and he was glad, for she was not the lady of his dreams.

He knew electrically, a moment later, that the woman he waited for was really drawing near. He cast down his eyes, postponing the moment of meeting hers in a sort of terror of possible disillusion. Yet not for worlds would he have given up the right to raise them. He ought to get up and seat her. No, a waiter was hurrying to do that. He stared at the menu card in a hand that was not entirely steady.

He saw that she was lovely long before he realized that she was Joan.

For a great many seconds they stared at each other, in a surprise that was as great on her side as on his.

"All this time I've been writing to you!" she gasped at last. "Paul! Oh, Paul!" Some of the things that she had written to him came back to her and her face began to burn; she dropped her eyes, whispering almost voicelessly, "I never dreamed—"

He leaned toward her unabashed, devouring her new beauty.

"How could you dream it was I? Any more than I could guess it was you—we never knew each other in those days! Joan, what have you done to yourself? May your husband tell you that you're a dream of loveliness?"

She colored deeper now, with utter pleasure.

"I thought you were a much older man. I—I liked you so! I thought perhaps you'd been married and had some little babies!"

He laughed at that, but sobered quickly.

"Ah, please go on liking me! You're Joan, and you're not Joan; you're a woman I know better than I ever knew a woman in my life before—you're a veiled stranger I've fallen madly in love with, and—and on top of it all you're my wife! Joan, what can I say to get you to forgive me?"

"I think we said everything, didn't we, in our letters? After all, there was only one thing I couldn't forgive. And only one thing I want to hear you say—" She had forgotten all Virginia's teachings now, forgotten the penance she had meant to make him do, the pretense, which indeed was useless now after the revelations in her letters, that she had long ago stopped caring. She begged, "Say it again, Paul—what you said just now!"

"How do I know what I said? I'm stunned! What part of my ravings do you want me to repeat? That I'm on my knees to you for forgiveness?"

"Oh, no, not that, not that! The part about having fallen in love with me, of course!"



The Sisterhood of Don

By Winston Bouvé

Author of "His Christmas Angel,"
"Rotten Wood," etc.

IF Don MacLane had dallied a month or two longer in his beloved Paris, he would have come back to find his brother actually engaged to Jill Fallon, who matched her name for Celtic loveliness of black hair and white skin and mermaid eyes. For Paul, shy, unassuming Paul—it had been so easy for the diffident brother of talented, much-adored Don to grow up in obscurity—was only waiting to ask her to marry him until he should be promoted to the rank of house physician at the hospital where he had taken his early training. And Jill, who was an ardent young creature, admired with all her heart his fine, conscientious work, his shy reserve that a look from her lovely eyes could dispel, his devotion to his artist brother. She knew, of course, that he cared for her, though he had not told her so, and she was beginning to build air castles for the two of them—when Don came home.

Every one spoiled Don, from his innumerable girls to the rich old grandmother who had grumbly sent him off to Europe to study art, after the debacle of his college career. She was a hard-headed old Scotswoman, close with her money, quick to scathe him for his idleness, his neglect of her, his airy affairs with girls—affairs that inevitably ended in a sort of platonic intimacy that only Don could negotiate. But, unfairly enough, she, like most people, lavished her love upon her younger grandson.

It was characteristic of Paul to take his brother's favoritism as the most natural thing in the world. How could people help preferring one so handsome and gifted?

So, from the day on which Jill first saw Don, from the hour in the gay hotel restaurant where he was lunching them both, the elder MacLane, with the merciless second-sight of love, saw what was going to happen.

It happened soon enough. Don, as susceptible as he was irresistible to women, found himself straightway enamored of "old Paul's" charmer, and he proceeded to engage her whole attention. To be fair to the boy, he never suspected that his brother cared for Jill, or any woman; one didn't associate that sort of thing with Paul, who had always been mute about what lay nearest his heart. And so it happened that before the fortnight was out—Jill was Irish and young and romantic to the core—they discovered together the ecstatic glamour that waits upon infatuated lovers. The phrase is apt. For Don, for the first time in his irresponsible life, perhaps, was in love to the hilt.

And Paul, who loved them both, crawled back into his old shell of reserve and hard work, as soon as he made sure that Jill wasn't just another interlude in his brother's youth, but, at last, the genuine love.

That very spring saw them unoffi-

cially engaged. Don begged to be allowed to claim her openly, and Jill often wanted wistfully to be claimed. "Lynde, Ltd.," and his interiors filled her days. She was only a slip of a girl, but she had the decorator's eye for effects, and the color and form sense that even that notable house was willing to pay for—and she had to share Don, or forgo his society, many an evening. But old Mrs. MacLane had to be considered. She was very necessary to Don between commissions.

"And as long as she objects to your flirting with all the girls you do flirt with, you can take it that she'll object to any more expensive and permanent attachment!" his unofficial fiancée assured him drolly, for the thousandth time, upon the April day that saw him back from a week-end house party in Westchester, and more ardent than usual after the four-day separation.

Her eyes danced at him across the débris of dessert; the spring sunlight splashed her ivory throat, her slim hands, with gold as it sifted down upon them through the latticework above. They had been lunching in the newly opened "garden" of an insignificant restaurant in the Forties.

"Jill!" His tone carried extravagant reproach, a reproach that was only a mockery, for she didn't let his meteoric friendships with other women disturb either of them. In the month she had known and loved him, she had discovered, besides Don, her own and very perfect lover, Don, the careless, the irrepressible and charming, who loved her, but who liked people, and being liked by them, more than anything on earth. And "people" usually meant women.

"I've a hunch, darling, that Granny and her objections can go to the devil, with our compliments, before long," he told her, suddenly serious, lighting a cigarette from the glowing end of hers. "One good commission, you know——"

The thought of marriage muted them both; they were so deeply in love. And, with the shining delight of Jill's lovely eyes mirrored in his own, he told her about some people he had just met. Western people, plastered with money; a porky aunt and a magnificent niece, who were coming to his studio that week. If he could get a commission to paint Christine Vane—Lord, but she was beautiful!

Jill, finishing the last of her strawberries with diminished ardor, scored herself for her pettiness. Wouldn't the portrait of one wealthy belle make him? And did she want him to be blind to beauty?

"What is she like?"

"Big and blond and beautiful." He flung back his own fair head, envisioning the girl. "A professional pal of a girl, because she's so beautiful in rusty-brown tweeds and such a goddess on the golf links." He chuckled impishly. "She's developing an ardent interest in art, and she thinks I'm a very nice young man."

"And after she's seen what you can do—and you *can* paint, Don——"

"It'll be in order to ask her to dinner. I'm to lunch with them soon—to meet Paul. We'll make it a four-some!"

He laughed because Jill couldn't see why taking Felix Vane's daughter to dinner would help him get a commission from her.

"A fine point of salesmanship, darling, that you ought to know. Are you under the delusion, Jill, that when you do a man's place up the Hudson to suit—or set—his newly acquired tastes, you're merely selling him so much time, so much labor, so much glazed pottery and Florentine carving and needle-point tapestry? Rot! You're selling him Lynde, of London, and Miss Fallon and the rest, incidentally. And when Christine Vane hands me her father's handsome check, it won't be for

so many feet of Christine, in oils, on canvas, but for surfeited vanity, for the romantic opportunity of posing for a charming young man Christine likes, for a dinner or two—and so on. Oh, Lord, you've got to go, I suppose!"

He rose with her, paid the check, and they sauntered out into the street.

"So that's why Christine is to be cultivated."

"Well, I'm rather curious about her, too," he admitted naively. "She's so utterly gorgeous, Jill, I want to know what else she is. Superior or shy; aloof or scared stiff of people—or plain dull. You can't get much out of her!"

He left her at the majestic portals of the house of Lynde, and that was all she heard of the Chicago beauty until the night she met her. The dinner for four came to pass a week or so later—by grace of Paul, from whom Don had borrowed enough to carry him through—in the grill of an exclusive hotel just east of the Avenue. Jill didn't enthuse over meeting Christine or being paired off with Paul; their beautiful relationship had been quite spoiled. She sometimes missed his comradeship, in spite of Don. But things couldn't ever be quite the same again, so what was the use of seeing each other, being stiff and silent, or talking of impersonal things?

Still, she made herself as lovely as possible for the occasion, dawdling an unconscionable time over her hair and the tilt of the silver comb that emphasized its blue-black sheen, the fastening of the lacy black gown Paul used to like and Don had never seen.

She approved, at last, of the girl in the glass, after she thrust a crimson flower into her corsage and rubbed a little carmine upon her beautifully cut lips. She did not rouge. Her tea-rose pallor was better as it was.

"You're not pink and white and gold," she told that distinguished young person, "but I think you'll do."

It was late when she entered the

splendid lobby of the hotel. She didn't have to look long for Don's broad shoulders and sleek, fair head. He was standing near the palm room, laughing with a girl whose wrap he was taking from her splendid shoulders. He turned, saw her, but it was Paul who came forward and met her between the onyx pillars.

Her assurance was oozing away in this costly splendor; and when Don presented Miss Vane, with an "I-told-you-so" gleam in his eyes, it vanished completely. For Christine was superb, flawless, from her perfectly modeled head to her slim, brocade feet. Hebe, in a Callot dinner gown whose folds were the color of raw gold—the color of her splendid hair. Her throat and bosom, her shoulders, were triumphs of divine sculpture; her features more perfect than those on a cameo brooch. And beyond her miraculous good looks she was just a nice girl who found it hard to live up to being the great beauty that she was.

It was quite natural, of course, for Don to take possession of her all through dinner, and leave Jill to Paul. As a matter of fact, the beauty would have been at a loss with Don's doctor brother. It took Don's ease and gayety to bring her to anything like animation. But she didn't need to speak. While Jill listened to Paul, who was telling her all sorts of interesting things, as if the black gown had brought back the old Jill—his Jill—she watched the vision opposite her, caught her breath whenever Christine smiled or turned her ravishing head. Don worshiped beauty!

They had reached the ices when the talk turned to pictures, and it was Miss Vane herself who spoke of some of the pictures she had seen in Don's studio. Jill puzzled her; she couldn't quite place her. Jill seemed on such intimate terms with both brothers—Christine thought of all the sketches

of her she had discovered in the studio. Could she be a model? She wasn't very clever, Christine.

"Aren't you the 'Girl With a Fan,' Miss Fallon?" she asked in her lovely voice. "I adore that!"

It was Don's best picture, almost completed. Jill dimpled.

"I posed for that. I like it, too."

"If it's just a picture, I'd like to buy it," said Christine.

"It isn't for sale!" Paul interpolated swiftly, frowning through his cigarette smoke. Jill's portrait for sale?

Doctor MacLane puzzled Christine, too. She didn't care for him, though he was rather nice looking. She couldn't find anything of Don in his keen, grave eyes, his delightful mouth, whose sensitive irony she missed. But he certainly seemed devoted to the Fallon girl.

"Lord, no," explained Don. "You see, Jill is to be the next Mrs. MacLane."

It was too bad to have to announce Jill just then. Old Paul might have known that his chances were bettered by passing as heart-whole before the pork packer's daughter. But Christine misunderstood.

"Your brother's a very lucky man!" she congratulated.

And while Paul caught his breath, flushing, and Jill tried to smile at the natural mistake, in spite of the lump in her throat that it should be so natural, Don said gayly:

"Damned lucky! We all are."

There passed a terrible moment, while the hidden music rippled through the great room and the fountain near them purled musically and the laughter and chatter of the diners about them went interminably on. Jill kept Paul silent by the touch of her hand on his, beneath the table edge; sat pale and speechless in the shaded rose light that made Christine glow like precious metal, while Don's moss-agate eyes

pleaded with her across the silver and bloom. "It's all for you, dear," they promised, as his eyes always did promise. Wasn't he going to explain? He was speaking.

"That dress makes even your eyes golden, doesn't it?" he said, as if he and Vane's daughter were alone.

The beauty flushed; her candid eyes were flecked with gold, as hazel eyes sometimes are. Now they became topaz.

"Does it?" She hesitated. "Perhaps, then, as I can't have Miss Fallon's portrait, you'll paint one of me. In this gown. My father wants a picture of me, and I'd like you to do it, if you would."

"If I would!" breathed Don.

The beauty, still flushed, turned impulsively to Don's brother and the girl he was going to marry.

"Aren't you proud of him and what he can do?" she asked. "He'll be a famous artist some day."

Paul sipped his demi-tasse in silence; Jill's resentment flickered out before the other girl's glowing, happy gaze.

"Very proud of him," she murmured gently. "You poor dear!" she added to herself.

The portrait was done by the end of June. Next to the still unfinished Jill, whose baffling eyes and elfin smile, half hidden by the feather fan, arrested every one who saw the canvas and made older artists urge Don to further effort, the golden girl was his best portrait. And for all his youth, he could paint! His years abroad had not been spent wholly in pleasure.

Jill liked Midas' unspoiled daughter as she got to know her, but she couldn't help being glad that the aunt's gout made imperative a trip to Baden, and that Christine was to sail with her on the first of the month. The situation had been inconceivably awkward for every one but Don. And Don adored

situations, as long as they were his. It was Jill who, though hurt to the quick, had to keep Paul from forcing his brother to end the farce. But it was Christine, quite innocent and not very clever Christine, who was hurt the most.

Jill, in a mood that matched the late June afternoon outside in Sheridan Square, where the trees and grass still flaunted their young green and old New York's ivy-sheathed bricks their perennial virginity, danced up the last flight to Don's studio.

She knocked, and knocked again, and then opened the door which was never locked. It always thrilled her a little to come here, to find in the sudden silence of the room in which he left so many traces of himself all but the presence of her lover: and after a little, how dark and empty it seemed without him; how still, with only the ghost of his whistling, his absurd snatches of song! And when he returned!

She came in slowly, took off her flower-garden hat, laid cool hands to her deeply flushed young cheeks.

There stood Christine's portrait, eternally mute, eternally gay, smiling as Don had made her smile—because she was more beautiful that way. He had painted her in the gold-colored gown, and so radiant was she that it was easier to believe the sunlight he had let into the foreground was reflected from her, rather than that it turned to glory her yellow dress and hair.

Jill knelt in a high-backed chair, her cheek pressed close to a discarded coat of Don's, and regarded the portrait long. It meant a good deal to them both—it meant Don's freedom from the naggingly generous, lonely old woman on Twelfth Street; it meant a studio flat they could both call home; it meant not sharing Don any more with all the people, the women, he liked so well, the artist girls and Christines and Bess Raddalls—she was a youngish widow who,

petted him, and whose sketches languished along the walls in dozens; it meant—

He was coming up the stairs. With a throaty little laugh Jill flew across the studio, whisked into the kitchenette. He'd find her gone, because he was late, as usual, and be sorry before she would come out.

"Not a soul," said Don, opening the door. "That means you'll have to stay long enough for tea."

"Not tea."

It was Christine, and Jill wondered if she should know they were not alone. But after she spoke again it was too late.

"I only wanted to say good-by again. You can't say much before other people, can you?"

"Other people," agreed Don, with his winning laugh that made every woman feel its tenderness was for her, "are such a rotten nuisance!"

From the rustle of silk Jill, crouching in a corner of the kitchenette, fearful of every word and sound, knew he was taking off her wrap.

"I've never seen you in gray before."

She was probably smiling.

"I've been shopping. There's so much to do before Tuesday."

"Tuesday," he echoed disconsolately. Jill heard him screwing the canvas on to the easel. "Never mind the pose; it's just the hand I want. It's not quite—there! Thanks awfully. Tuesday! Why don't you call it off? Your aunt can go alone. Stay here and be painted again! I love you in that gray dress."

Jill heard only a whistled refrain from a recent play, "My Golden Girl."

"Till I met you—" He burst into song as the hand that had bothered him was remolded under his brush, stopped abruptly.

"Christine! What is it, dear?"

"You!" said a strangled voice. "Please go away—don't touch me. Don't you know what it is? You!"

There was a long, a desperate silence, punctuated now and then by a snuffle.

"I'm terribly sorry."

"That you don't love me," said Felix Vane's only daughter. "I suppose you can't help being Don. It's my fault. You treat us all the same way. You're quite fond of us all, aren't you?"

"Don't try to call me the cad I am politely!"

Jill knew he was pale, wretched, torn with contrition; he could always be desperately sorry for what he had done.

"Christine, I'm sorrier than you'll ever know. I am fond of you, my dear—but that's all."

"I knew it. But I tried to believe the other. It wasn't hard, sometimes; that night you kissed me!"

Jill heard him groan.

"I shouldn't have done that! It was beastly unfair to Jill!"

"Jill?"

"Yes, Jill." He flung himself down on the creaky couch. Jill knew his head hung, shamed and sorry; she, too, had seen him in the torments of contrition.

"I'm just a rotter, I suppose. Jill is going to marry *me*—not Paul. I let you believe the other because it seemed more of a lark, and Jill didn't mind—much." He got up suddenly. "Damn it, I'm lying now. I let you believe that because I wanted you to give me a commission, so that I could marry Jill. I thought—you liked me, and would do it more readily if you didn't know about her."

"It's a good thing you told me," said Christine in such a small, unhappy voice that she seemed to have shrunk to a Lilliputian in size. "I was almost ready to offer you me, to marry. I'm quite beautiful—and Felix Vane is my father." The last she added beguilingly. "I'd like to have given you the success you want."

"Don't!" He must have flung up his head here. "At least"—he laughed drearily—"I'm not for sale. That

brings my stock up a little! You deserve an awfully nice person, Christine. Go away, and if you don't forget me, think of—not Don—but a poor, conceited beggar who can't make even himself happy very long."

"I won't forget you." She was at the door, but Don didn't move.

"Don't. And like me a little, even if I'm not worth it," he begged rather wistfully, being Don. "I feel so rotten!"

"I'm afraid I shall," said the Lilliputian voice.

When she had gone, Jill slipped out of the kitchenette. Don lay face down on the shabby old couch, his face buried in his arms. She knelt beside him before he knew she was there, and put her arm about his slack shoulders.

"Jill!"

"I hid in the kitchen to surprise you, and then, of course, I had to stay there."

He hid his face against her breast, like an unhappy little boy, and she knelt there, absurdly young in her blue frock to be mothering him with her soft touch and tender eyes.

"There's no one like you, Jill. You—you angel!"

He sat up at last, his hair tousled, his fresh color faded, a little wan under the eyes.

"Had to throw in my watch till the first. Is it awfully late?"

"No." Jill felt her throat constricting. "Are you going somewhere?"

"Bess Randall wanted me to fill in at dinner," he admitted slowly. "Some one couldn't come—she's always doing something like that, and she's so damned charming she gets away with it!"

He looked at her anxiously.

"You'd rather I wouldn't."

"It's late," urged Jill gallantly. "It would be dreadful to disappoint her now. Make haste."

He caught her in his arms, kissed the pulse fluttering in her throat.

"You are an angel, Jill! And a very perfect one."

"Tell me, instead," faltered Jill, "that I'm damned charming, too!"

"Isn't it nice, this being engaged again?" inquired Paul, who had only recently taken his brother back into grace.

"It is!" stated Don joyously.

He and Jill and his brother had been picnicking on a lonely point of the Palisades, and the driftwood of their fire burned beautifully against the September dusk that had come down from the slopes behind them.

Jill smiled back at him as people smile at happy children. She was not beautiful, Paul told himself for the hundredth time as he saw her kneeling by the fire—it was always necessary to assure yourself of that when you were with Jill—though all Don's loves of yore had been. The boy was a stickler for perfection in any type. But that was it. Jill wasn't a type. She was—Jill.

"Lovely thing!" he thought to himself, sitting apart from the lovers, but looking into Eden, and upon her happy mouth and eyes—dancing eyes, very like Don's own, except that hers always crinkled tenderly at the corners, even when she smiled, like Du Maurier's dream duchess. "He's making her happy now." He was almost happy himself in the thought.

"And is it such a novelty?" she inquired.

"It shouldn't be," Paul put in.

"It's quite different from anything else!"

Jill knew he was speaking to her alone now.

"The others, h'm. Never have understandings, Paul, the kind every one understands better than the half-wits involved!"

He found Jill's hand under her cape and pressed it. The cold feel of the ring she wore—a lovely pearl bauble

acquired since Mr. Vane's check—still filled him with a certain pride of conquest. How different Jill was from the romantic idyls he had entered into since he had come home from studying abroad, though the Lord knew they were charming enough girls—he liked them enormously, even now—but she was not so easily won.

They were to be married in November, and, Don thought tenderly, very happy himself, he would always keep her as happy as she was now. Dear Jill! How handsomely she had behaved about the Vane girl. Some women, now, would object even to the half dozen perfectly nice girls he still played with, now and then, and with whom he was on such comfortable terms of intimacy—often after a less comfortable interlude—that they were almost like sisters.

His brother was thinking with him of the other half dozen.

"You ought to be a cad," he told him silently. "Though, as far as I know, you've never stolen another man's wife or spoiled a good girl, it's only because you haven't been playing for stakes, but for the game. But you have played with a man's unfair advantage, if you haven't cheated. And yet—you aren't a cad!"

"I do like sensible women!" burst out Don, still thinking pleasurably what a perfect creature his Jill was, as he settled his head on her knee. "Most people as pretty as you, Jill, don't have to be, or just aren't, by way of keeping the law of compensation on its feet! But you, darlin', are one exception—Bess Randall's another!" he remembered.

Jill lifted her slightly irregular, wholly charming brows. Mrs. Randall had porcelain skin and Venetian-red hair; she entertained "odd" people charmingly in her Gramercy Park apartment; she was at once wistful and intriguingly gay, so that men wanted

to do things for her pleasure and tell her about themselves; but only Don could have called her sensible.

"She dyes her hair," sighed Paul, who had been trying to coax "Tipperary" out of a harmonica he had bought from a small boy peddler, strayed from Palisades Park.

"Remarkably well!" defended the widow's champion. "It's beautiful, too. She's very keen about you, Jill. She wants me to bring you to dinner next week."

Jill surveyed her small shoes.

"I thought we weren't telling people about us, yet."

"I," asserted Donald, with a slightly virtuous air, "am perfectly willing to tell people we're engaged."

Paul put down the glittering but false harmonica sadly; he knew if he looked at Jill their gravity would collapse.

"And besides," continued Don innocently, "Bess is the sort of person you tell things to—about yourself."

Jill no longer wanted to laugh. She swatted a mosquito on his cheek with unnecessary fervor, and that was the last she heard of Mrs. Randall, for the dinner materialized the following Friday.

To Jill it was an event. She went riotously in debt for a silvery green frock—but it was cheap, she felt, for it made her look like the person Don painted when she posed, and it made Don quote sonnets to her mermaid eyes.

The place and the people were spiced with being different—so different from her faded two rooms and bath on University Place, from her shabby, nice friends with their husbands, and her shabby, clever friends without them. Mrs. Randall, shimmering below the shoulders in silver brocade, made Jill feel that she was the guest of honor, and, what was more endearing, made her quite conscious of the perfection of the green gown. So it didn't seem queer for Don to be at home enough to van-

ish kitchenward to mix the cocktails and look at the French dressing.

Mrs. Randall might have been influenced by the popular Shavian repertoire in town in picking her company. There was a gaunt, gray man whose silence and courtesy reminded Jill of Paul; she liked him, even when he turned out to be a horse fancier and nothing else. There were a divorcee and a bishop—he was an accident—of equal prominence, a young Jewish actor, a few others, just people, and, in particular, there was Dolly Varden. She was only a slim thing with a bobbed fluff of fair hair and disconcerting eyes that didn't match the look about her soft mouth when she wasn't laughing, but she was the dinner! She looked like an animated doll in her brief blue frock that blossomed at the bodice into a quaint bouquet of roses, and she tinkled, like an expensive toy. She was, in a word, a choice theatrical production.

She came late, after dinner had been served, and upset the entire table in taking her place by the bishop.

"I'm a dreadful person," she informed that delighted gentleman. "I've heard you preach about me, once, and I'm worse than that! I dance in a revue for a living—a leg show, mmmm"—she fixed him with her bold, beautiful eyes—"and vamp the extras!"

"Heady little devil!" chuckled Don to Jill, quite audibly, so that she turned and made charming eyes at the nice, yellow-haired boy.

And when it was time for her to leave for the roof garden where she had kicked her way to summer stardom, Don left, too. It amused Jill afterward to remember that it was Bess Randall who was aghast at his departure; who scored him with her wine-brown eyes when he came back, much later.

In a few weeks he got to know Dolly very well.

"She's the best little scout," he told Jill one rainy afternoon as he lounged before the fire in her tiny apartment, which she was soon to leave for the studio flat she had found in the Fifties, cheap, but big enough for two. "Jill, do you know she's got a rotter of a husband that she practically has to keep, and a kid—a cute little boy? Varden's a mess, I imagine." His eyes clouded. "She's never said so—she's a high-stepping, plucky little piece—but I think she's afraid of him. She always hustles me out of the way if she thinks he's homeward bound."

Jill, a fire sprite in her red frock with the light leaping over her, looked long into the flames.

"Are you playing fair?" she asked at last.

He sat up.

"Don't you think I am?"

"No," said Jill. "Don't you know that you hurt Christine, that you're hurting Bess Randall, this Dolly Varden, too, I expect—and most of all you're hurting me!"

"You?" muttered Don. "Why, Jill, you've always been so wonderful about my friends. I didn't know! Christine was just a silly girl to take me seriously. Bess, why Bess is just a woman I like and admire—as you used to! She's years older than I am. I told you she was sensible, level-headed, and all that and——"

"And Dolly can take care of herself. But what about me? I—can't!"

They had both risen, as people do, in defense.

"I'm just a woman, and you're just the man I love; I don't want to share you any more."

"You've never been like this before," accused Don, wondering how anything so disagreeable could have spoiled the Eden of their afternoon.

"No." Jill smiled. "I thought I was being clever; now I think I've been a fool. I can't go on sharing you; it's

got to be me or them. I think it will be them. It's beaten every other woman who's cared for you, hasn't it, this sisterhood of yours?"

"You want me to belong to you!" he flared, bright-eyed, frightened. "You women are all alike; you cling and cling and want to take the place of everything and everybody else—and you can't!"

"Not any more," said Jill, beyond tears.

"Jill, we're quarreling!" He kicked over the chair between them, clasped her in his arms. "How could we come to words like these to each other? There's no one else. Kiss me—don't hide your dear face. I couldn't live without you, Jill, and I'd rather die than hurt you. I need you so terribly much; you know I do!"

"Yes," she thought, "you do."

"You're all I've got, really." The plea no woman can resist fell readily from his lips. With his arms about her, his dear mouth on hers, so tender and sorry, she remembered nothing but the dreadful moment when they had stood defenseless and bitter foes, and with a sobbing laugh she crept closer to his heart.

"The thought of losing you!" laughed Don shakily, after they kissed.

But the vision of Dolly's frail mouth and feckless eyes persisted; poor Dolly, with the rotter husband she was afraid of!

"It's only Dolly I mind," she told him. "Let her alone, Don. Even if Mr. Dolly's a mess—they've got the little boy——"

"I'll never see her again," he promised passionately. He sank into the big chair by the fire, drew her down into his arms. "I don't want anything but this—ever!" They kissed again. "Happy now?" he asked, after a little.

"Awfully happy!" Jill challenged the shadows of the quiet room.

But he had to leave her to go to his

grandmother's that evening, and when Paul came, in spite of the rain, to take her to a concert the tear marks were still on her cheeks. It was odd, she reflected, that she sometimes shrank from seeing Don if she were unhappy or disturbed. But Paul was different. No one ever minded him, she guessed, not even the people at the hospital whom he had to hurt.

"We quarreled—foolishly," she explained her tears to him.

"I'll wring his neck," offered Paul, thinking it kinder to be gay. When he smiled like that he was very like Don, and for the first time she thought: "If only Don were more like him!" Treachery.

"It's not his fault; it never hurts him to love anything."

Paul knelt to put on the rubbers he made her wear.

"He does love you. You'll always be first, Jill." He felt at once heroic and forlorn.

"But he's last, too, with me. I've only got him, and I'm afraid I don't want him to have other things, painting and people and adventures"—she paused an instant—"and women friends. He's a splendid friend!"

She was defending her absent lover now, and Paul, who loved him, too, rose gallantly to the defense.

"But it's all right now. We've made up; I'm quite happy again."

Why, she asked herself as he snapped off the lights.

"I wonder," said Paul wistfully, opening the door for her, "if I'll ever make any woman that happy."

When she came back that night she found that Don had been telephoning her frantically, but when she called the studio there was no response. And for three days she neither heard from him nor of him.

"I couldn't get hold of you. I phoned and phoned, and you were out," Don explained—Ains.

plained despairingly. "What could I do?"

"What did you do?" inquired Jill gently. "Tell me all of it. I'll do what I can."

The early sun gilded the windows of Jill's little sitting room and patterned the carpet through the blind. She was ready to leave for work, but her chocolate stood untouched, her roll unbuttered, for Don had appeared, white and frightened and very young, and was telling her something dreadful and asking her to help him.

"You know how gay and spirited she is, quite dauntless! She wasn't like that when she came the other night. He's broken her, at last. Cowed her with threats to take Jock—that's the little boy—away from her. And not only that"—his eyes were round with horror—"he struck her, Jill. There was a red welt across her bosom—you know how white she is! It was terrible—terrible. And purple marks on her arms, some new, some old."

His breath came hard and fast.

"She didn't want to undo her wrap, so I'd see them. She's proud. She had brought little Jock with her. I was the only one, she said, that she could come to. You see, Varden's been trying to get a divorce and the custody of the child. That's why she'd stand for so much. What could I do but take her and the kid away?"

"Where?"

He told her the name of the little Pennsylvania town to which they had gone that night.

"They're still there. I had to come back," he explained naively, "to get some money."

From his shamed eyes Jill knew he had come for that. Don could never save anything, but she had been saving a portion of her salary, whenever she could, for their home and her troupeau. She knew he was asking for it.

"I can't go to Paul. He'd want to

know what it was for; and Granny's shut down on me, pro tem. I've nothing left to pawn."

She went to the desk, drew out her bank book, and showed him the paltry balance. She could not feel tender toward him at that moment.

"Will that do?"

"It will help a lot. The kid's been sick, so we had to have a doctor."

She did not even wince at the intimate "we." How helpless he must have been, Jill thought. A broken reed to lean upon!

"Take this, too."

She drew off the pearl ring which he had given her; his extravagance was going to be of use, after all.

"Not that!" he objected sharply, but he took it all the same. "You're wonderful, Jill! There's no one like you."

"I'm late," she interrupted him breathlessly, "and I've got to go out on Long Island this morning."

He was afraid and ashamed to do anything but leave her, her check and her ring in his pocket.

The day's work was done at last, and it was five when an office boy told her there was a man waiting to see her in the reception room. Don? For the first time in her life her heart beat no faster at thought of seeing him. She dawdled at her desk, signed twenty letters. She did not want to see him. He was inalienably Dolly's now!

But it was not Don who sat squatly in the papal chair in the hall. It was a sleek-haired, slightly squinting, sporting gentleman in checks whose presence proclaimed what he was, an ex-book-maker and jockey, and crooked at that.

"Mr. Dolly!" breathed Jill. She straightened. He had found out, of course, and come to her to damage Don, but he had come to the wrong place. She became as fiercely protective as an animal shielding her lone cub. She had been wrong, upstairs at her desk: Don, in danger at least, was still hers!

"My name's Varden," said the sporting gentleman, eying Jill as he eyed all women.

"I know your wife," Jill told him.

"And so does your friend, Mr. Mac-Lane, which is no secret, I'm betting!" Dolly's husband began to breathe with a sort of wheeze. The veins crawled out on his forehead like so many white worms; in an instant from being merely obnoxious he became venomous.

"But p'raps you don't know that the dirty whelp's lit out with her, and they've taken the kid—*my* kid—along with 'em. P'raps you don't know your fine gentleman friend's going to be hauled up on a nasty charge! They both are, the sweet pair! P'raps you think I can be bought off!"

"You must speak more quietly," interrupted Jill, with shining eyes, standing straight as a little toy soldier, but wishing he wouldn't breathe in her face. "You don't know as much about it as I do, for I know where your wife and little boy are now, and I am helping them stay there."

"It's a damn lie," grunted the outraged husband. "I followed her to his place, and lost 'em both afterward in a jam." He cursed every traffic regulation and officer colorfully.

"It was a pity." Jill chanced a splendid bluff. "For he brought her to me, quite naturally, as we are to be married soon, and we took them away together. She'll not come back soon, I'm thinking, unless she wants to bring some charge of her own."

"'S a dirty lie," he bellowed huskily. Luckily the place was deserted. "You're helping them out of it!"

Jill, who had not felt much for a long time, began to be amused. This was picturesque!

"You don't really think that," she assured him. "If what you say were so, wouldn't I be the last person to shield them?"

He had moderated, she soon saw.

"I'm just telling you I've had a raw deal. Maybe you went with 'em, maybe it was your party, but maybe I have a right to kick, anyway. Where's my kid?" He was impressed; it was a fact that no red-blooded woman would stand for that kind of a deal, and this fancy little dame had the spirit of a blooded mare.

So he listed his grievances, and told what a straight girl Doll had always been, in spite of the dancing she had to keep up since he was down on his luck, and how good a mother, too, until this young painting chap had started her off. He held his derby in both hands and sniveled, and admitted that he had been hasty of tongue and hand.

And at last he had to be content with the promise that Doll would write him, on account of little Jock. Altogether it was degrading and pitiful as well.

She went back to her office and sat huddled before her desk, her little head bowed upon its unyielding top, until the sweepers came. She was still tearless when Don turned up quite late that night, forlorn and sorry and pitifully grateful to her and for her when she told him what she had told Mr. Dolly.

"But aren't you going to take them the money?"

"I sent it, instead."

"You needn't have stayed for me," said Jill steadily. "You'd better go back to her!"

He stared at her, less crestfallen now.

"Go back to her? You've misunderstood things awfully, Jill, this time. You think— There's no reason why I should go back to her." He laughed abruptly, wished he hadn't. "It wasn't an elopement, you know. And I can't possibly go back!"

"Why not?"

Jill looked down at her loosely clasped hands. How bare her left hand looked without his ring!

"Because it's beastly awkward and unpleasant all around," he said fiercely.

"She's a little fool, Jill. She took me—quite seriously. Now do you understand?"

"So did I," murmured Jill, with a fine irony he missed. "Why shouldn't she?"

"You will misunderstand me," he groaned, and kicked the iron dog guarding the left wing of the fireplace. "You will put me in the wrong, make me sound like a cad. I've been faithful to you, Jill. I took her there as my sister, and I treated her as my sister, all the time we were there. I couldn't have done anything else. Why, she's common, Jill, vulgar, tinselly, cheaply scented! There was nothing between us—nothing!"

"Nothing?" queried Jill.

"I thought you believed in me, loved me!" He flung himself away from her in a temper, hoping the storm would soon blow over.

"I do—I did."

He turned abruptly, held out his arms. His moss-agate eyes pleaded.

"Jill! How can you hurt me when I love you so? Don't stand off there, so quiet and aloof. I'd rather you were angry. Come here. Don't my lips, my arms tell you how I want you?"

Jill kept the table between them. Something had happened to her. She was not afraid that if he touched her she would weaken, falter, forget everything again. She knew tragically that his lips, his arms called her in a language she could no longer understand.

"Do you think I'd be faithless to you now, or after we were married? I couldn't take another woman in my arms—there wouldn't be room for her. Oh, Jill, don't you trust my fidelity?"

"Of the flesh, I think," she told him, puzzling over the strangeness of it all. "But it's of the spirit, too, isn't it?" She stopped suddenly. "You don't understand, do you? You'll never believe that if you had been unfaithful to me, if you'd taken Dolly because you

loved her, or thought you did, and then come back to me, disillusioned, I'd still be loving and wanting you, perhaps! It's true. But you can't be really faithful to any one long enough, Don. And you've been far more faithless to Dolly than to me, haven't you? You let her give up everything she had, even risk little Jock, and then offer you herself! And you—declined with thanks!"

"I think," declared Don, with a ghastly smile, "that I'm being declined with thanks. And I'm not sure why I should be! Couldn't we be practical?" he suggested, after a brief pause, with a spurt of his old arrogance.

She smiled as she shook her head.

"I've given you back your ring. Good-by, dear. Be good and happy and don't hurt people more than you can help."

That was all she had to say to him.

It wasn't an easy winter for Jill to live through. But Paul, who, ever since the episode of Christine Vane's portrait, had been very much the dear, tender person he had been during the first year she had known him, before Don had come home, kept her from loneliness, and waited.

It was March, a chilly March, so that he still came to sit by Jill's fire of evenings, after he had left the hospital, when Jill discovered that she was cured. He had spoken of his brother and an exhibited portrait of a prominent debutante.

"It's so much better this way!" Jill assured them both as she read the clipping that mentioned the young artist's success. The embers sent up a shower of sparks. Paul watched her profile, translucently fair against the light. Something in his regard touched her.

"Don't look at me like that! I'm not playing the forsaken, am I? I'm not heartbroken, unhappy even. It's spring, and I'm not twenty-three yet."

"But you did care for him most awfully, Jill," he pleaded curiously.

"Oh, yes," She smiled. "I cared—terrifically, for that matter. So did Helen—until after Troy fell. Then, perhaps, she went home and got domestic and raised a family. I'm shaky on my Greek history."

She was challenging him to be gay.

"And," she sighed, "if Troy hadn't fallen, Paris would have gone romancing again. Helen might have grown stout, or just become a stale adventure—there's nothing worse than that—and the loveliest story in history wouldn't have been told!"

"And after the fall," continued Paul with perfect gravity, "she did go home, I'm sure, and was much more comfortable and happier as plain Mrs. Menelaus than she had been in Troy. Living up to being Helen of Troy was a considerable strain at times!"

Jill stuck out her left foot to the fire, having toasted the other thoroughly. Her eyes danced beneath their lashes.

"To say nothing of keeping romance pitched to high C all the time, and wondering how to hold it there!"

Paul stooped to put on a fresh log.

"I'm not charming," he said. "I'm none of the delightful people Don can be. I'm neither whimsical nor talented. I'm an awfully imperfect lover, Jill."

He had risen, had drawn her to her feet, and he still held her willing hands. How strange the words sounded on his tongue at last!

"But I'm niceish," he added, emboldened by something in her bright, startled eyes. "And I'm substantial, and I'm always on time!"

"Five minutes before," Jill encouraged. "Go on, dear. You're a year late as it is—and Troy's fallen, forgotten!"

He drew her rapturously into his arms, and as his lips met hers, Troy, that immortal town of all lovers, reared its magic ramparts once more.



The Woman Hater

By Elizabeth Irons Folsom

Author of "The Missing Life Line,"
"Pitch," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was the usual crowd in the reception room, waiting to see Doctor Hale King, eminent specialist in nerve disorders. It was the noon hour and the blond girl at the desk had just told the latest comer that Doctor King was at luncheon and that it would be an hour before he would receive patients.

That was not the strict truth. Doctor King was on the other side of the ground-glass door at the end of the room. He did not go to luncheon, but he did take one hour during the day for relaxation. There was not a vacant chair in the room, but no one betrayed any emotion when the announcement was made. One or two of the men glanced at each other uneasily and one woman leaned sidewise and whispered tensely—whispered as if the place required it; as if it were something more than a doctor's public waiting room. The others merely clasped their fingers differently; perhaps traced new designs with their shoe toes.

At that moment, a slight girl came in from the corridor and stood hesitating at the threshold. Every gaze in the room was leveled at her, curiously. She flushed and put one hand up to the open collar of her coat with a frightened look in her eyes. Her trim, tailored suit was freshly correct; her brown shoes and her brown hat matched its color; matched, too, her eyes which were set far apart and seemed too large for her small face with its troubled mouth and cleft, pointed chin.

Under the straight, composite stare, she fumbled with her gloves and they fell, a crumpled roll, to the floor. She picked them up and walked over to the desk.

"Doctor King——" she began.

The girl at the desk repeated the formula about luncheon.

"I am his sister," said the visitor.

The girl promptly inserted a plug, murmured some words into the instrument, then disconnected and the plug snapped sharply back. She spoke to the newcomer who swayed a little as she crossed the room, opened the ground-glass door, and disappeared. The watchers looked at each other, briefly, and curiosity slipped into dull waiting.

As she entered the room, Doctor King got up quickly from his long chair by the window.

"Virginia!" he exclaimed. "I did not want you to come out this way. Who came with you?"

"No one." She smiled, then swallowed hard and caught at his arm. "Would you believe I could be so silly? Why, Hale, my heart is beating just as fast! A little sickness like mine should not have made me good for nothing. I am foolish. All the way from the car, I was afraid I should fall off the sidewalk, it seemed so narrow. Wasn't that a silly feeling? And I am perfectly well again, too. I had quite a big breakfast and ate it all."

Doctor King put her gently into his chair.

"Sit there a minute. Then I want to talk to you about yourself."

She leaned back, sighed deeply and closed her eyes. Doctor King walked across the room and stared out of the window over the sea of blistering roofs.

He was tall and slight; his gray hair made his face seem more youthful, but there were tense lines about his mouth. In figure, face and pose, he spoke the ascetic; he embodied repression, absorption, a sternness that was kindly enough, but that held no recognition of the trivial; that had not taken time for youth. He would have worn a cowl and cassock well. Perfectly, but for the low fires in his eyes.

He looked across at his sister in the chair by the other window; he looked about his stern room, his gaze resting upon his desk with its closed, orderly drawers, as noncommittal, as rigorous as the will that ordered it. Then he stepped forward, hesitated, and the muscles about his mouth tightened.

"Virginia, do you think I always want to do the best for you?" he asked, crossing over to his sister and looking down at her unsmilingly.

"You began when I was a year old, didn't you? I believe I am the only person you really like, am I not?" Her smile was full of trust like a child's.

The gleam of tenderness that lightened the grimness of his face was only momentary.

"I have been your father, mother, brother, since you were a year old and I think I rather like you"—he was trying to speak lightly—"so, whatever I say, you will know it is for your good, won't you?"

She nodded.

"You just told me that you were foolishly afraid in coming here to-day. That fear is part of the illness from which you have not yet recovered. I want to see to it that the fear does not continue and grow."

"Oh, it won't grow. I am all right now."

"I have been wondering," he said

slowly, "how to make you understand that you need special care for a long time and that I want to arrange for you to have it."

"I am having it. You are dearness itself. Hale, see the flag on the building yonder. Isn't the color wonderful against the sky?"

His gaze followed her pointing finger. For a moment he hesitated, then he spoke incisively.

"There is no flag there."

She stared at him and he brought a chair and sat beside her.

"Virginia, do you understand what I am saying: there is no flag there," Doctor King said very slowly, as if he were explaining something to a small child. "It is one of the results of your sickness, that you think you see it."

"But I see it. What do you mean?"

"You do not see it. There is no flag there. It is a fantasy that comes from your weakened condition."

"Why, I don't believe you!"

She sprang to her feet. Color flamed into her face, her forehead puckered to a frown; her chin set firmly. Her soft young beauty was, for an instant, singularly like her brother's steeliness. There sprang into the gentleness of her eyes, a sudden question. There were generations of firmness behind Virginia King.

"I don't believe you," she repeated, but the higher note in her voice betrayed her fear.

"Don't you believe that I know what I am talking about? Do you think I would tell you that, if it were not true?"

She turned swiftly to him.

"Oh, no, no! Of course not. But isn't it curious? It seems so real. I can see it there, waving in the wind. It stands straight out"—she caught his arm—"you don't mean that I am—like those patients! That I am—"

"No. If you were, I could not talk to you about it. But you have been very ill and you have little vitality to hold

you steady. That you are unsteady is shown by these little hallucinations. It is a temporary condition, but I want to handle it in my own way. I *must* handle it so. You must do exactly what I want you to. Will you?"

She laughed a feeble, small laugh.

"That I should be—have hallucinations! I can't believe it."

He looked at her compellingly, sternly. There was a moment of silence.

"All right, Hale," she said at length. "I'll take your word that I am—visionary. I must be, or you would not say so. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to have a special nurse who will take care of you. You must have absolute quiet and rest, under my direction, for a year."

"A year! A year is a long time!"

"You are twenty. A year is not much, if it means perfect health afterward."

She looked at him steadily.

"Is that all, then? When does it begin—this treatment?"

"At once. I have already sent for the nurse I want. I had expected to take her home to you."

The telephone on his desk buzzed. He picked up the receiver, listened a moment, then turned again to his sister.

"She is here now, Virginia."

"Oh, I am frightened!"

He put an arm about her.

"You will like her. Then, there is another thing: I have asked John Marshall to come over to arrange for the transfer of your business matters to me. You may not remember, but your loan of sixty thousand is due now. You had better give me authority to take care of it and make the new investment. You will have to put your business formally into my hands. You want to do that, I suppose?"

"Of-course, if you say so."

"Then I will send him out to the house, in a day or two, and you sign whatever he tells you to, so that the

matter may be taken care of. Will you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Good!" he said, kissing her cheek. "Now we will have Miss Wells in and she shall take you home." He pressed the button on his desk and a moment later Claudia Wells came in from the outer room. She was a tall, straight woman; her head rose firmly from a thick, white throat, she had broad shoulders, white, capable hands and remarkable eyes—pale blue under black lashes and brows. She was beautiful because of her hair, glossy black, banded close about her head.

Doctor King was busy with some papers on his desk. It was several minutes before he turned toward Miss Wells. She was standing with her back to Virginia, watching him intently, her lips slightly parted.

"I have told you just what I want done," he began quickly. "You will let me know of anything needed for her comfort. She is to have walks and rides and everything that does not include the effort of talking or thinking."

"Yes, I understand," the nurse said and just then the buzzer sounded again.

"It is John Marshall," said the doctor to his sister. "You and Miss Wells go into the inner office while I talk to him. Lie down on the couch, Virginia. Perhaps you can have a nap before you start home."

Doctor King shook hands with the young man who came in, when they had gone.

"I thought you would not mind dropping in here a minute to see me, so I took the liberty of calling you."

"Glad to come. Always glad to do anything for you, you know," declared Marshall, with a note of sincerity in his voice.

"Thanks, John, that's good of you. But look here"—the doctor's keen eyes rested on the tired lines around the younger man's mouth—"you're working

too hard, I'm afraid. You need not smile. I know I do, too. That is why I am sorry to see you sticking so tight to your work. There's gray at your temples already, John. By the time you are my age——"

"But I must stick tight," Marshall interrupted. "I must guard myself. I like pleasure. I'd like to play once in a while, but I realize that success lies only in the determination to stick. I wish I were not whirled about, but was plumb on my feet as you are."

There was an odd note in the doctor's answering laugh.

"I am whirled about enough, but I don't advertise it. That is one of the secrets of success—to make others think you are confident, even if you are not. But I called you in to get you to draw up some papers for me—I'm taking over the management of my sister's money for a year. You can do it, can't you?"

"Yes. Do you want it done at once?"

There was no curiosity in his tone, but Doctor King moved restlessly.

"The fact is," he said, "things are rather bad for us just now. Virginia's illness has left her in a mental condition that needs all my thought and skill to pull her out."

"You don't mean——"

"I don't mean that it is anything permanent, but her nervous breakdown has left her, for the present, in an odd state. It's bad, but it will yield. However, it will take a year to restore her shattered health. But in the meantime, one of her loans is coming due and I want it placed so that I may control it until she is well again. You will know how to do it."

"Yes. I'll arrange it. How about her signature?"

"I will take you out home when you are ready. You don't know her, do you?"

"Only by sight. I'll get to it at once, doctor."

"I wish you would."

Marshall went out and Doctor King sat staring at his desk. He moved some papers about nervously, dropped them and again stared straight before him. Finally, he unlocked a drawer and drew out the one article it held—a picture. As he gazed at it the fires in his eyes flared up suddenly. The click of a latch startled him and he covered the photograph hurriedly with his arm. The nurse entered the room and came toward him.

"I heard the door close," she said. "She is resting." She stood at his desk without saying more and he looked up impatiently, but as their eyes met he spoke in a tone which he tried to make cordial.

"I am much indebted to you, Cláudia, for dropping everything and coming to me at this time."

"You knew I would."

"It will be a hard pull to keep her contented," the doctor continued, ignoring her words. "We must do that. I want her to be happy. I want to make it as easy as I can. Just rest, seclusion; that could not possibly hurt any one, could it?"

There was a note almost of appeal in his words. She put her hand quickly over his as it lay on the desk.

"Oh, nothing to hurt her at all." Her tone was reassuring.

He drew away his hand, with a quick, impatient movement that uncovered the photograph. The nurse caught a glimpse of a woman's face. The blood flamed into her cheeks. She clenched her hands together and her white teeth gleamed.

"Doctor King, why do you want to make it appear that your sister is mentally unbalanced?"

Doctor King met her gaze and her challenge. There was no emotion recorded in any line of his face, as he swung around in his chair to look at her.

"Oh, forgive me! Forgive me!" she cried in dismay. "Whatever you do is right. It was jealousy. I did not mean to question you. Forgive me!"

His voice was colorless as he answered her.

"An outbreak like that is inexcusable, Claudia, even from you. I am sorry I asked you to come. I will make some other plans and you may go back to the hospital."

She gripped the edge of the desk.

"You are so hard," she accused. "Can't you understand how I am sometimes hurt—because you do not care? I saw that picture. It stung me. I know how crazy women are about you. You say you hate them, but when I saw you with that—I could not bear it. I did not mean what I said. Of course, I do not question you. Will you forgive me and forget about it?"

"I have depended upon your friendship, Claudia, but I cannot depend upon it longer, if there are to be such outbursts."

"There will never be another. I beg your pardon for what I said."

He put a hand lightly upon her shoulder.

"There is no foolishness of any kind between us. You know that I am not a philanderer; that I do not care for women. If you cannot stay upon the platform of friendship and helpfulness, there will be no platform of any kind between us. I dislike sentiment and you know it."

Her gaze went back to the corner of the picture, but she only said quietly:

"Shall we go now?"

There might have been relief in his acceptance of her words.

CHAPTER II.

Doctor King knew what he wanted done and those who listened, seldom failed to understand; Claudia Wells understood and so did John Marshall, as he made ready the papers for which Doctor King had asked. The young lawyer made several trips to the King home, before his part of the business was completed.

Doctor King and his sister lived in the house which their grandfather had built and which stood, stately and grave, punctuating the line of modern and ornate structures which had swept to and beyond it, on the drive. On the other side of the drive the water spread to the sky line.

The King house stood behind a tall, iron fence, looking like a grand last scion of a family born into the aristocracy. The line of pert villas which had sprung up on either side seemed upstarts, with their dormer windows and broad eaves shadowing geometrically the scarlet of their geraniums.

A narrow, uncertain street passed at the back of these houses. It was dusty and wavering, and skirted the high stone walls that protected the rear of the florid grounds. Beyond the street, there were high weeds, tangled and sandy bushes; straight trees sprinkled thinly up the slope to the top of the bluff where the trolley ran. The little road which began so bravely faded into nothing at all beyond the King house.

On John Marshall's third business visit to the King home, it happened that a couple of brocade-lined limousines had come together just at the point where the little street struck out from the drive. A crowd had gathered and chauffeurs were arguing loudly. John saw the little street for the first time. He turned his runabout down the slight slope to avoid pushing his way through the crowd.

He drove slowly, grateful for the shade cast by the bluff. On the hillside, the dingy greens and dust-misted yellows of black-eyed Susans bordered it; on the other, high, straight walls made grateful privacy. In one or two places the inside decorations had strayed to the top and cast fantastic shadows into the little road. Great heads of hydrangea—lavender, blue and pink—nodded a friendly greeting and over some of the new walls woodbine was already begin-

ning to grow, clutching its way with green fingers.

He was thinking of Virginia King. He had been quite willing to carry out the plans that Doctor King had made. He had much admiration and respect for the doctor, already established at the top of the profession he had chosen—Marshall sighed as he considered that he was still far from the top of his own profession. Doctor King was a recognized authority and had arrived at that point quickly.

He had been glad enough to drive out with the papers, at first, merely for the sake of Doctor King, but almost at once he had been interested in the girl, though he had not known how to approach her. Her brother had said that she was mentally disturbed. Just how far that was removed from the padded cell, he did not know and his visits were uncomfortable because he felt that he should see something that he did not see. Virginia King was a little whiter than most of the girls he knew; a little sligher; a little more reserved; but beyond that, she seemed quite like them. She was well dressed, too, and had a bit of haughtiness.

The Kings had scorned the idea of a rear wall and their grounds were separated from the little street by a neat privet hedge. The formal front veranda spread around to the rear where it formed a screened living room. Virginia was reading in one of the cushioned chairs and, looking up suddenly, saw him coming. She waved her hand to him—waved it gayly as any other girl might have done. John felt a quick flash of indignation—he did not know why.

"Well, how are you?" he said as he entered the room, and then hated himself. That was not at all the thing to say to a girl who—to remind her of—He thought she saw his feeling. Hastily producing his papers, he pointed out certain lines for her signature, and considered how slight her fingers were and

what a pity it was that her rings rolled around on them and bumped their settings on the table.

"Don't fit, do they," he said as she adjusted them.

"They did fit. Before I was sick, you know."

"They will soon fit again, you are getting well so fast."

She looked at him and then at the papers on the table between them. They were proof that she was not getting well so very fast and that he knew it. Just then Claudia Wells came into the room and stood as if waiting for him to leave. He looked at Virginia again: she was leaning forward in her chair, her hands clasped about her knees, her shoulders drooped, her chin down! As he looked, the sun slipped back of the bluffs and at once they seemed to be in twilight. She raised her face in the shadow and he saw that her eyes were brimming. The instant resentment that seized him was already familiar.

"Come and have a spin for an hour, Miss King," he said impulsively. "My car will take you up to the lake and back, before it is dark. Take a coat and come." He spoke as he would to any other girl. A faint flush tinged her pale cheeks as she turned toward him eagerly.

But it was Miss Wells who answered.

"She has had her drive to-day, Mr. Marshall. I think she had better not go again."

Virginia's face was like wax as she rose and put out her hand.

"Good night," she said, smiling bravely. Then she left the room swiftly.

Rage seethed within him. The calm finality of her brave smile, her quick acceptance of conditions, fired his blood.

Marshall turned swiftly to Miss Wells who was looking oddly after Virginia.

"I can't believe it!" he exclaimed. "I can't believe there is anything the matter with her that a little laughter and a few good times would not help."

"It does seem so," she replied as he waited for an answer.

He picked up his hat to go, but stopped abruptly.

"I don't suppose it is any of my business"—he hesitated—"but as I was asked to do this by her brother, I suppose I may be excused. I want to know—how does she seem when you are alone with her? Do you ever really think that she is—that there is— She seems quite all right to me, and I wondered if when you are alone with her she is different. If you think——"

Miss Wells hesitated too. Then she looked at him steadily.

"She will recover, but it will take at least a year."

"Then you do see something wrong?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you know. And, of course, Doctor King knows," John admitted reluctantly. "No one better. But I'm hanged if I don't feel sorry for the little thing, she is so game about it. It was an awful thing to tell her."

"If he could tell her and make her understand, it is proof that she will recover."

"Yes, so he told me. But I don't get it. I am sorry for her. She seems so—alone. My idea would be to amuse her. But I'm not a doctor, and he is."

Marshall felt so sure that she would say more that he waited a minute, but when she did not speak, he gathered up his papers and snapped a band about them.

"Good afternoon," he said, and went down the steps.

When he had climbed into his motor and jerked the levers, he muttered some short, but emphatic words under his breath.

"I don't know why I should worry. She has a brother to look after her." But he was distinctly irritated about something—something that had to do with her brimming eyes and her wistful smile.

Again he drove slowly along the little dusty street. Before he had reached the spot where it joined the drive, he saw a woman walking near the wall where the shadows lay deepest. She was coming toward him and as she stepped aside to let him pass, he saw a mass of corn-colored hair piled upon the top of her head. A rose-colored scarf floated about her shoulders. Suddenly she turned and faced him.

"Well, of all things!" she cried. "Jack! You! Here! How perfectly funny! Where did you drop from?"

Marshall stopped the car with a jerk.

"Where did *you* drop from, Rosalie? What in the world are you doing here?" He caught her outstretched hand.

She laughed and narrowed her eyes at him. They were gray, under black lashes, a singular contrast to her yellow hair.

"I am spending the summer here."

"You! Spending the summer in a place like this! The last time I saw you, you were dancing on the Hippodrome stage."

"And I shall dance there again," she said, tilting her chin. "But I have taken to country life. I get so tired of New York."

"Don't try to humbug me!"

Her answering laugh was all silver notes.

"But I live right here, Jack. See?"

She pointed and he saw what had escaped his attention when he had passed earlier in the afternoon: a gate, or rather, a door in the wall, one that fitted so closely it was not easily noticed. She took out a key and unlocked it.

"A locked gate in a shaded wall! Mysterious, as always, Rosalie?"

"Come in and see."

He got out of his car at once.

"I am glad to see you," he declared. "By George! It seems like a leaf from the past—a gay leaf suddenly handed to me in the middle of a dull day. I am

glad to see you. I feel like saying it over and over again."

"Come right inside and say it then," she invited gayly.

He passed through the gate with her and she locked it after them. He saw that they were within a vine-wreathed pergola that joined a bungalow which was almost hidden from the drive in front by variegated shrubbery.

"But what are you doing here," she asked as they climbed the steps to the shaded porch. "Are you hunting solitude, too?"

"I have a client out this way. My dear girl! You have fixed yourself right, haven't you?"

On the veranda were wide wicker chairs whose cushions ran riot with pink roses; the same chintz gleamed from a broad couch. Hothouse flowers nodded in great vases; there was a deep swing piled with rose-colored pillows; a collection of varicolored glasses and decanters that sparkled stood upon a white wicker table.

"You do your country in luxury," he smiled. "Bless your heart, Rosalie! Where have you been all this time?"

She filled two of the glasses and he took the one she brought him.

"Where do you get it, in this arid country?"

She smiled enigmatically.

"Drink it at once so you can have another. This is great! Shall you stay to dinner with me, Jack?"

"I have not been invited."

"Well, you are not going to be. Not to-night. Perhaps to-morrow, if you are very good."

"Why not to-night?"

"Because some one else is coming."

"At your old tricks?" he queried. "Who is it this time?"

"What do you care?" she challenged.

"I care a lot. Didn't I bring you up? Didn't we live in the same hideous boarding house in Thirteenth Street when you were beginning to dance and I was see-

ing the world in the shabby parts of New York. Will you ever forget that house?"

"But we had good times there. It was a lot of fun, getting started. More fun, even, than now."

"Oh, come," he protested, "I don't believe that. You are a luxury-loving person and were then. I remember the run-down red shoes you wore until they were rags, because they had big buckles that flashed—at a distance. I can't quite fit you in with the flowers and all this stuff. You go better with the white lights. Tell me, how does it happen? Why are you here?"

"Why? Well, I'm just here, that's all." Again she laughed.

"Love, Rosalie?"

"What passes for it."

"Looks pretty comfortable."

"It is a dream inside. It's just as I wanted it. I took a notion for furniture—and rugs and things. Between you and me, they are beginning to pall a bit. But I won't be here much longer: the season opens in October. I shall go back in September."

"It is a good thing the man cannot hear the tone in which you say that. He would not be flattered."

"I never flatter any of them. That is why I keep them as long as I want to."

"And you are past master in the art of keeping them! But you don't want them long—don't forget that!"

She shrugged.

"Truly, Jack, come out and see me. Will you come to-morrow?"

"Not to-morrow, but I will come, Rosalie. Perhaps when I do, you will tell me about him."

She frowned, then leaned forward quickly.

"If they were all like you, Jackie," she said gently, "there would not have been so many of them. Do you know, I've often wondered why you never tried to make love to me!"

"I didn't want to lose you as a pal, Rosalie"—Marshall smiled reminiscently—"you were such a good pal then."

They were silent for a moment, then Rosalie said abruptly:

"But see here, what about you? What have you been doing all this time? Have you made a fortune?"

"No fortune," Marshall answered, "Still, I suppose I'm getting along fairly well—as well as a new lawyer could expect. I haven't made a splash—but you have! I've seen your picture everywhere."

"I've made a lot of money"—she sighed—"and I've spent a lot. Some of these days I shall be stony broke!"

"Better save while you can," he advised seriously. "I suppose I'd better go now, Rosalie," he added. "He might come, you know."

"Oh, don't hurry," she said, but she looked at her glittering watch and stood up. He rose, too.

"You'll come again—soon—won't you?" Rosalie asked as they walked slowly down to the gate.

"Indeed I will," he answered. "And now I must say good-by."

A moment later the door in the wall closed behind him and he heard her turn the key quickly.

He walked across the road to his car, thinking of the encounter. Odd to have run across Rosalie, in that shaded bungalow. She had been a plucky little fighter in a world not gentle to unprotected, beautiful girls. Think of finding her here!

His car was barely moving when a jangle of trolley bells caused him to look up the bluff. He saw a man plunge down through the trees into the little road. A man whom he recognized at once. It was Doctor Hale King. Marshall opened his lips to call to him but the doctor was walking rapidly, oblivious of his surroundings. Suddenly he stopped at the door in the wall. John's surprise kept him silent as Doctor King

unlocked the gate. He entered the little garden and the gate clanged metallically after him.

CHAPTER III.

Doctor King had not seen John Marshall. He had been gazing straight ahead as he came down the hill and across the dusty road. Even after the gate had closed behind him, shutting him in the perfumed garden, softly radiant in the summer twilight, his eyes did not swerve. He did not see the flowers swaying gently toward him from either side of the pergola. Color lighted his pale face, his straight, thin lips were parted, his firm chin looked mobile, his shoulders leaned forward a bit, so strong was that which drew him and toward which he was hastening.

But he mounted the steps deliberately almost hesitatingly. His face was none the less eager, the fire which had smoldered in his eyes was now a flame, but he walked slowly. It was as if another emotion had strung weights to his limbs. He defied the weights and went on—they only halted, they did not restrain.

The pink-pillowed porch was empty. Rosalie's scrap of handkerchief lay on the doorsill. He picked it up, held it in his hand and looked at it intently. He still carried it as he crossed the threshold into the room beyond.

That room was a riot of vivid, flaming yellows that glittered in long fringes; molten gold ran in streams down silken folds. Rosalie had made the house to suit herself. Her golden room had pleased her, though it might have had a touch of green about it, she had said—the green of the bank notes that had made possible its golden completeness.

A row of wide windows on one side of the room, muffled with lace and soft silks, made a becoming background for any one who chose to sit among the cushions on the low couch that ran beneath them. And Rosalie was fond of making pictures of herself on silken

couches. The odor of tuberose, cloying, thick, like a vapor almost to be seen, saturated the room. She loved that heavy fragrance.

Doctor King sat down to wait for her, crushing the handkerchief nervously in his hand. He waited long. She never hurried. In the early days of their acquaintance, he had learned that his part was to wait, her part to come when she liked, to go when she liked, to do always as she liked.

He sat where he could see her yellow couch. It shortened the moments to be able to make pictures of her there. He knew her gowns: their colors—almost knew their fabrics. He made his pictures earnestly: yesterday she had worn a pale blue over a very bright green. He no longer laughed at himself for making these pictures; almost at once they had grown to be too vital to consider lightly. It was only during the first few days that he had thought it absurd. He never remembered any more when he came into the golden room, that he was considered stern, unemotional!

Just then the yellow curtains parted and Rosalie stood between them, her eyes provocative, her lips a scarlet, smiling line. Her white shoulders rose from filmy black, her arms were bare, slim, and softly curved.

He moved forward to meet her, his eyes ablaze as they rested on her scarlet lips.

"You came so early," she said petulantly, putting out a languid hand, "I had to fall into my dinner gown. I didn't have half time enough to really dress, because I am very careful about not keeping you waiting."

"I know how careful you are. You have never yet considered me for an instant. I think you never will."

"Oh, are you complaining of me?"

"No," he said under his breath. "I am worshipping you."

She drew her hand from his eager clasp. She granted him no privileges;

it was sufficient that he be allowed to look at her. Sometimes she promised, always she allured, never acquiesced. She shrugged her slight shoulders.

"Why do you all say the same things? It seems odd that men are never original."

"I hoped there was no longer any 'all' in your mind. I hoped I had been able to make you forget the others. I have tried."

"That's it. That's why you fail. Don't try."

"You don't care."

"No. I don't care. Therefore, you do. That is, you have cared. Maybe you are beginning to be tired."

She laughed lightly at the look in his eyes as he leaned toward her.

"I wonder if we are never going to have anything to eat," she grumbled, stifling a yawn. "After all, I believe I like a big hotel better than an establishment of my own. Very soon now, Doctor Hale King, I am going back to the big hotels and the joy of having what I want."

"I have tried to give you what you want here."

"You did not have to give me anything. I did not ask you."

"Oh, don't!" he said eagerly. "Don't! If you knew how I fight through the days just to get to you! If you knew how your face gets between me and what I am doing all the time! It teases me, as you do. Your image is always before me."

"It must be very tiresome," she murmured. "Ah, here's something to eat at last!"

He winced and dropped the hand he had stretched toward her. She touched his shoulder and the blood flamed into his face.

"Oh, Rosalie, if you only cared! I'm afraid that you never will. And yet you fill my heart—don't you know that wanting you is—"

"Oh, come in, Fidelia," she inter-

rupted. "Yes, we will have our dinner served in here. I shall sit on my very own couch. There, Doctor King, sit opposite. Yes, bring it right in, Fidelia."

She ate her dinner with dainty greediness. She laughed, she chatted about the day, the flowers, the garden, the flavor of the food.

"You do not amuse me when you sulk," pouted Rosalie when they had finished and the maid had withdrawn.

"I do not mean to sulk," he answered eagerly. "I mean to amuse you. And now, I have something to show you."

"Something you brought me?"

"Yes." He took a box from his pocket and pushed it across the table.

She opened it eagerly and lifted out the opal pendant it contained uttering little exclamations of delight and surprise.

"It's a beauty! How did you know I did not have a really fine opal?"

"You told me."

She flashed him a glance.

"Oh, did I? I had forgotten. This is a wonder! Just see the fire in it. I am not superstitious about opals at all. I don't believe they mean death, or separation, or anything like that, do you?"

"I hope not. Not separation. I should not mind the other so much. Do you like the setting?"

"I love it. It is so dear of you to have remembered that I didn't have one. Would you like to fasten it around my neck?"

His fingers were cold as he fumbled with the clasp.

"Such cold fingers!" She shivered. "And they shake too. Or are you very awkward?" Then she whirled swiftly at the touch of his lips on her shoulder.

"You must not do that! If you think you are buying my love with your opals, Doctor King——" She made a quick motion as if to take it from her neck, then dropped her hands.

"Silly!" she scolded. "Do you know, it is so queer the way people talk about you,

Some one told me, just to-day, that you were the finest surgeon in the city, but very unsympathetic; that you had no feeling for any one. She said, too—such a joke on you—that your women patients were all crazy about you, and that you had never looked at a woman in your life; that you hated them. She said you were hard as rock and cold as ice. 'Just granite,' was what she said."

"That is what I am and always have been."

"Then how you have deceived me!"

Doctor King rose and walked to the window. He stood for a moment looking out into the misty garden. Rosalie stretched her arms languidly and ran her finger tips down their soft roundness. He came back and sat down beside her again.

"But I am like that," he affirmed. "You don't understand what it means to me, to feel as I do about you."

"You mean it gets you rather hard," she asked curiously.

"I mean it takes me by the throat. It throttles me. It is not as if I had scattered my love about as——"

"As I have? Never mind. I like you, even if you are peculiar. You have such taste in opals! Do you know, I love the things you have given me. You know just what I like. It is so sweet of you to understand." Her voice was unusually kind as she leaned over and patted his hand. He caught hers and held it in a tense, nervous grip.

"I have a surprise for you to-morrow."

"Oh, what?"

"Guess."

"Oh, I can't. Tell me."

"No. You're not to know until to-morrow."

She tilted her chin.

"You are too extravagant. You must not give me such expensive things. I can't let you do it."

"But you will like this."

"Well, we'll see. And I think you

are really sweet." She put her cheek to his eager lips.

She started to tell him of John Marshall's visit but stopped at a sudden thought.

"It's foolish to talk too much," she murmured.

But Doctor King, watching the curve of her lifted face, did not hear.

CHAPTER IV.

John Marshall thought of little else that evening, as he ate his dinner alone. It had been a startling thing to him. He had stood still in the center of the little street and stared incredulously—that plunging, hurrying man was the austere Doctor King! And there was a woman on the other side of the gate to which he carried a key. Why did he carry it? Why did he come home that way? Was Doctor King the mysterious person who was to dine with Rosalie that night?

The half smile with which he answered his own question, died as it came. What of Virginia? How could the situation affect her? If a man like that fell in love he would fall very hard. Well, it was Doctor King's business if he wanted to be foolish. He laughed shortly, but the laugh died on his lips.

The next morning Marshall paid a visit to Doctor King's office. He wanted to see the man who chilled with his austerity—and who carried Rosalie's key! He wanted to talk to him about Virginia and to note the way the doctor spoke of her.

After they had discussed some matters of business, Marshall casually mentioned that he was going into the country that morning, and as his route would take him near the King home, he would like to stop for Virginia and take her for the drive, if her brother was willing.

Doctor King was willing, but he was more interested, apparently, in a sheaf of appointment cards than in John's request.

"I had not intended to send her on such jaunts," he said. "But I can rely upon you to remember that she must be shielded."

John could not find a suitable answer. He felt hot and cold, eager and baffled. Facing Doctor King, he felt that any criticism of the older man was unwarranted and foolish. But he could not help wondering why Doctor King had been so concerned about his sister's condition and the treatment she was to have and why, within a few days, he was almost careless about following out that treatment.

Virginia was sitting alone at the foot of the veranda steps when he drove up.

"I am trying to take an interest in the day," she said and smiled, but her eyes blurred and again he felt a personal interest in the situation. Strange how alone she seemed against the background of her home.

"Try the day in my car," he replied.

"I'm afraid I can't go," she said wistfully.

"Oh, yes, you can," he assured her quickly. "Your brother said I might take you with me into the country for a couple of hours." Her smile of gratitude rewarded him.

As she went into the house for her wraps Marshall heard a faint rustling of crisp linen. He frowned with a sudden fierce dislike for the emotionless woman who was guarding this girl. But a quick warmth banished the frown when Virginia appeared, with a sapphire-blue sweater high about her throat. A faint flush tinged her cheek and her eyes sparkled as they met his own. He realized, with a sudden pang, how small a thing had made her happy.

"It was very good of you to stop for me," she began, when the car was running along the drive. "I suppose you thought it would be good for me."

"No. I thought it would be good for me."

"You are joking. I like that. Hale jokes sometimes, too."

"Does he?"

"But not so very much. He is rather serious, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"But you are not. I can see that, already."

"I like that word, 'already.' It indicates that you are starting a friendship that has a future."

The smile with which she answered him made his heart beat faster.

"Put your hands out into the sun," he directed. "Let it color them. How fast do you like to ride?"

"Oh, I like to go very fast."

"That is the proper spirit. Shall I touch her up to forty?"

They sped down a long hill beyond which lay other hills where dark, wooded silhouettes pricked against the sky.

John Marshall had not cared much for girls. It had been hard to lash his profession into shape: he had wanted to play tennis and golf, to hunt and swim, to live out-of-doors. His straight back and his broad shoulders fitted into the open rather than into a law office. His leisure time he had spent in the country—walking or driving—usually alone. He had wanted to bring Virginia King out that morning, because she was troubled and little and pale.

He looked down at her with sudden gravity and saw laughter run into her eyes, deepen the cleft in her chin, make delicious crinkles in her forehead and about her eyes. Queer how her nearness brought that warm glow to his heart.

He began to talk to her of the out-of-doors: of the huge quiet and enveloping rest of the mountains; of their outheld hands of welcome and joy. He had bored a lot of people with his mountains, but, somehow, he did not appear to bore her. She listened eagerly and told him of her own love for great, friendly trees.

5—Ains.

It was only when he was helping her out of the car, on their arrival home, that he saw the strange, blurred look again in her eyes. Her fingers grew cold in his clasp.

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" he said.

"I have had such a good time," she cried eagerly. "But now I am getting all sick again inside. I'm afraid. Do you know what it means to be afraid?"

"How soon may I take you again?"

He thought best not to answer her question. But he noticed her quickened breathing. Her fingers had escaped from his and were pulling nervously at the neck of her blouse.

She smiled then and the quick color flashed into her face. Then he saw it fade as Claudia Wells came down the steps.

"We are going again to-morrow," he called breezily, with more assurance than he felt.

They did go the next day and the next. Then Marshall was called away from the city. He was away for several weeks and during that time he pondered much. Somehow, Virginia's brimming eyes and the look of fear that had driven the smiles from her face when they reached her home rose continually before his eyes.

On the day he returned, he found himself driving down the little street.

"Oh!" said Virginia, as he ran up the steps—and that was all. But John was not unsatisfied! She looked better, but he had determined not to make any reference to her condition.

As the weeks passed, there were many rides. John watched with delight the growing color in Virginia's cheeks, the slipping away of her little reservations, the springing into life of her laughter.

Whenever Doctor King was at home he was unfailingly cordial. But John watched constantly for something that he did not see. He did not call on Rosalie again, despite his promise. He did

not want to take the chance of meeting Doctor King there. He trusted to Rosalie not to talk of his visit. Doctor King was just foolish. Men were like that. He would get over it.

John dreamed beautiful dreams, made beautiful plans during his lonely evenings. He would very slowly plant in Virginia's mind the thought that he liked to be with her. That could not jar the nervous system of any girl, if judiciously done. He would watch and when he felt sure she had absorbed that idea, he would indicate that his attachment was growing. Then he would ask her, very gently, to marry him.

But one day when they were driving she turned suddenly and looked at him with dancing eyes that vainly tried to be demure, and then she laughed. It was a teasing little laugh that rippled girlishly and held a note of joy. John smiled down at her upturned face for a breathless moment—and his carefully made plans vanished. He bent and kissed her.

"I love you," he said huskily.

It was impossible that she should allow him to kiss her twice; it was incredible that she should cling to him as she hid her face against his shoulder; it was inconceivable that she should nod her head when he asked if she loved him.

Then a motor horn tooted around a curve in front of them. Startled, they sat back sedately and drove on into a new and shining world where even the water leaping up at the cliff was unlike any water that ever was.

When they approached the King house, John caught her hand.

"May I tell them we are going to be married?" he pleaded.

He felt her hand stiffen in his.

"Married! I forgot! I—cannot marry!"

"Not marry!" He stopped the car at the hedge with a jerk. "You mean you do not want to marry me?"

"I cannot marry! Oh, no, no! I never could. I—have that taint!"

"Nonsense!" He spoke loudly, anger flaming against those who had put that idea into her head. "Nonsense!"

She pulled her hand from his and slipped out of the car. She was shaking.

"Go, go!" she whispered. "Don't come back. I can never marry any one. I had forgotten. Oh, please, please never come back!"

She ran blindly up the walk. Claudia Wells, coming down, put out an arm to stop her, but Virginia pushed it aside.

"Let me alone! Let me alone!"

Her voice stung him. His anger flamed against the man who had caused Virginia's voice to have that ring. He turned almost fiercely to Miss Wells.

"Tell Doctor King I want to see him. And you, too. I'd like to see you together, you who have done this!"

Virginia's cry had swept away his hesitation. He did not care what the result might be; he demanded the chance to ask the questions that had been troubling him.

Claudia Wells stared at him.

"Doctor King is not here."

"Where is he?"

"He will not be home to dinner."

Marshall hesitated. He thought she wanted him to say more and because he thought so, he decided quickly to have it out with Doctor King alone. He would have liked to face him that moment, when his blood flamed and his suspicions tormented him. The nurse was too curious.

Claudia Wells went swiftly back into the house when he had gone. She had been afraid that Doctor King would hear their voices and come out. He was in his study alone.

To be concluded in the April number.



The Coward

By Frances O. J. Gaither

Author of "Pleasant Houses," "The Fourth Fate," etc.

DREW had known Marian a long time, oh, practically always, but he had realized her, so to speak, not at all until just as long ago as the span of three idyllic weeks. He saw her at a dance. And that fact in itself was strange, suggesting the intrusive finger of destiny, for Drew never went to dances. In the first place, he couldn't dance since he had come home from France with a stiff knee; and, in the second, he was suffering from another sort of stiffness, an unbending aloofness of spirit. Maybe the war caused it, along with giving him that groggy leg. But, anyway, whatever the cause, he was bored by rowdy flappers' knees and a girlish animation superinduced by champagne. And then, one night at the club, Wallie Keister exhorted him to shake his ingrowing grouch and look in on the ballroom for a couple of rounds. Which he did—with the result aforesaid of realizing Marian.

"Who?" echoed Wallie Keister as they stood looking out over the dancers. "Why, Marian Moore. Don't mean to say you didn't recognize her!"

"Didn't know she was grown up. Last time I saw her playing around she was a kid on roller skates."

In the hoyden rout she moved with a gentle demureness that made something melt inside of Cotter Drew. She

wore white and—yes, really—a blue sash. Her hair, though cut in flapper style, was yet mysteriously different. She did not drink too much champagne; in fact, not any champagne at all. She did not smoke.

"When the women do it, it seems all right; but the girls look rather as if they were showing off, don't you think?" she said to Cotter Drew, bending over her during one of the dances she was so beatifically ready to sit out with him.

Followed the three idyllic weeks. Day after day the sky of their happiness was as blue and unclouded as Marian's eyes. Wallie Keister shadowed it, at first, no more than the famous cloud which is never larger than a man's hand. True, they often spoke of him. Drew said it was "tough" and "rotten," but thanked God they had "found each other before it was really too late;" and Marian, sighing, repeated like a sort of inevitable refrain: "Poor Wallie."

Then came that unfortunate weekend.

It's strange how things happen. Now, Cotter Drew had certainly seen one man's share of grueling experiences; Marian, so young and soft, could never bear hurting anybody the least little bit; and poor old Wallie Keister

had never done any harm, unless you could count getting Marian engaged to him before she fell in love with Cotter Drew. What business had any of these people to be brought face to face with stark and painful issues? And here's another thing—if Drew's wooing of Marian had to come bang up against that ill-starred Sunday, why must it have run along for three whole weeks as gayly and prettily as some hammock romance?

Marian's mother had written, inviting Cotter Drew down:

Just ourselves and a very little party of our really good friends. You will take us as you find us, I am sure. Our little place can at least offer you comfort.

Comfort! The first misadventure, which itself went sadly deeper than a question of mere comfort, was Drew's quarrel with Marian. That happened before midnight, Saturday.

They were sitting in the fragrant, moonlit garden, alone for the first time that evening. Marian's shoulders felt warm through the loose mesh of her woolly scarf. Drew dropped a kiss on top of her bare head. She shivered deliciously, liking it.

"Cotter, dear," she whispered, "when you kiss me I always feel—nicer." She stressed "you" but slightly, yet the implication made Drew's temples throb. Of course, Keister had made love to her, but it was never a very pleasant thought. "And listen, Cotter, I've told Wallie I'll drive him to the country club to-morrow. I'm going to tell him then—no matter how it hurts. He's got to stop taking things for granted."

So the other still took things for granted! A chill slipped along Cotter Drew's veins. He drew his arm away. A fog of loneliness seemed to shut him in. Three weeks ago, it might have been for the first time, he saw her round, blue eyes, saw her short, sunny hair. What since? A half dozen meetings at dances, her shoulders glisten-

ing satin-firm under his eyes, an indeterminate number of drives with her mantled slenderness close beside him and the miles unwinding an endless ribbon between dark and scented woods. She twisted about and peered up at his face. Her hand tugged gently at his folded arms.

"Wait," he said.

There was something more. It wasn't enough that she was fair, that her caress was nectar. He had to know about *her*.

"What's the matter, Cotter?"

"You let Keister kiss you still."

"But I haven't liked it. I've hated it. Why, you aren't going to be jealous of Wallie—now!"

"You've hated it, but still you've gone on—belonging to both of us."

She shuddered fastidiously, and there was an edge to her tone.

"Do you know that sounds—common?"

"Don't let's quarrel, Marian. I'm not reproaching you. I'm just trying to understand." She was very young, really a child. Anything might be embryonic in her. Her eyes were wide and shadowy. Did they open on depths unplumbed or heights unscaled? "I've got to understand. Tell me," he said gently, "why haven't you just told Keister straight out—about us?"

Her bare head was flecked in the moonlight with leaf shadows. She shook her hair back and smiled, wooing him to smile.

"You see," she confided, "what makes it so hard, he barely knows I know you yet. Wallie's sensitive. You do see?" He didn't, but he nodded. "And," she summed it up, "I simply hate being horrid to him."

"But you've already been horrid to him, as you call it, when you fell in love with me."

His tone was no more puzzled than her peering gaze. She sighed.

"It's all very uncomfortable. Poor Wallie!"

There it was again, a red flag to inflame him. Damn it all!

"Saying 'poor Wallie' doesn't square anything," he blurted out.

She shrank away from him.

"You don't understand. I'm like that. I can never bear—hurting people."

"Are you sure that's pity for them?"

His voice was level. He had achieved coolness now. He went on, spoke of facing the consequences of one's acts, of pity, real and false. He felt, from the height of his twenty-eight years, immeasurably older than the little Marian who looked down, plaiting and unplaiting the fringe of her scarf. He sounded to his own ears almost fatherly when he mentioned that he sympathized with her flinching before her zero hour.

"You mean," said Marian in a very small, very chilled voice, "that I am a coward."

It surprised Drew dreadfully that they could quarrel.

Sunday began its course inauspiciously by the simple and quite irrelevant circumstance of Drew's realizing Marian's mother. Of course, he had known her, as he had known Marian, practically always, had sensed her dimly as a little dumpling of a woman with rather too many frills and sash ends on the lavender frocks she affected. But now, when she flew at him as he came downstairs, he recoiled from the clarity with which he saw her. He was dismayed to find that she mattered at all in his scheme of things; that she mattered, in fact, enormously. He didn't like her to be dumpling-shaped and soft-lipped. He didn't like her faded blond hair, her fluttery clothes. Trifles? Yes, but they entered, by unpleasant synthesis, into his reading of Marian.

"Just ourselves," she said, as she had said in her note, and he didn't like even

that. "No one else is down yet. So we can have a cozy chat." The burden of the chat was that he mustn't let himself worry. About Wallie Keister that was, patently. She wasn't worried. One could see that—that she was even glad, although she said, at the last, so tenderly, "Poor Wallie." This had a reminiscent sound. Cotter Drew frowned. "But you mustn't worry," she admonished him. "You must look at everything cheerfully and let bygones be bygones."

Then the rest, all but Marian, came down by degrees. And, about noon, there was breakfast, the kind where you serve yourself and the maids stand around dangling empty trays. There settled over Cotter Drew a chill fog of detachment that shut him off from the really good friends as completely as though he were disembodied. He saw, as through an actual fog, Trent and Keister stolidly assembling their breakfasts; Harbeck taking the silver covers off things and bending his bald head rather too eagerly to see what was underneath; and Ann Pezant, already seated, with her usual apple and dry toast, beckoning the Munworthy girl to her. Ann Pezant had red hair and a long throat rising out of a low-collared green blouse; and the Munworthy girl was squarish, which fact she rather insisted upon by wearing square-cut, baggy tweeds.

Cotter Drew took a slice of golden-hearted melon to a seat from which he could look across to the bright garden, and tried to conjure a vision in the open doorway. The sun lay on the flags of the patio. It stretched inside to pattern a slanting gold quadrangle on the parquetry floor and hang down a Jacob's ladder to a myriad climbing motes. It would be a pleasant and loverlike thing, if he could really fancy he saw Marian coming in from the garden, roses in her arms.

But the vision wouldn't come prop-

erly, because Marian's mother fussed about so. She was helping Trent draw off his coffee from the glinting copper machine on the buffet and crying out that if poor Wallie would just wait half a second she would look after him properly.

"Men are so helpless," she declared, looking reproach at the other two women.

They appeared serene and oblivious. They were talking about the curtain Ann Pezant was doing for her favorite little theater.

"Scads of black," said Ann Pezant, "simply scads, with a lot of smashing color. You know the sort of thing."

"Must be corking," said the Munworthy girl.

"Rather arresting," agreed Ann Pezant, beginning to munch her toast.

The Munworthy girl, with an eye on Harbeck, moved toward the buffet. Her resolute, swinging motion defied those men to devastate the breakfast before she had her chance at things.

"Where is Marian?" said Marian's mother. A white-aproned maid murmured in her ear. "In the garden! Well, go tell her—no, I need you. Whom shall I send? Ah, Mr. Drew, will you find Marian and bring her to me?" Drew renounced his melon. "Tell her we shall never get off to the country club if she doesn't come. Tell her I need her to help me look after you poor men."

"Seems silly," suggested the Munworthy girl. "They know what they want, I should think."

"Ah," said Harbeck, no longer over-eager, but affable as he made his third excursion from table to buffet, "but think how the men like being looked after!"

"Of course," said Ann Pezant. "The Turks!"

"I can't see it," objected the Munworthy girl over her shoulder. "It would bore me to death. It is shad-

roe, Mr. Harbeck. Pardon me. I thought you did have some."

"I suppose I'm 'old-fashioned,'" said Marian's mother. "But, after all, human nature doesn't change much. I do believe men will be men, always—and always like women to be womanly."

Cotter Drew went out across the sunny flags of the patio and down the rose-edged walk. He limped a little as he went. That groggy knee. It wasn't really bad, but it was stiff enough to remind him that he had not always felt soft, clean linen next his skin or moved on pleasant paths where rose petals lay. He drew a deep breath.

"Damn lucky," he reassured himself, "pretty damn lucky." And then he questioned: "What is a womanly woman?"

Marian was in the wistaria arbor. Her little white-crape dress was blown against her rounded, slender limbs, and she had on a silk sweater of turquoise blue. The sheen of her bobbed hair was such a light as never was on land or sea. She lifted her lips. Drew cupped one palm under the back of her shining head and with the other held her face up. She laughed in that maddening, almost huskily sweet way she had, and kissed him again, swiftly this time.

"Are women who swagger around in tweeds and talk like men in the litany, I wonder?" he asked, after a little. "And women with stringy throats and green blouses—" Obviously he could not include fluttery women, and so he broke off.

"Oh, but Ann Pezant *ought* to wear green with that red hair of hers," Marian assured him. "And, besides, she paints amazingly, so it doesn't matter about her neck. And tweeds are just a part of the Munworthy girl's pose. She's really fine. But do you honestly like me best as I am?" Drew made the only possible answer there was to that. Still she sighed. "I wish," she

said rather incoherently, "we could go back—you know, back of last night—or that I could, back to the very beginning, to December when Wallie— You know, Cotter, I did say 'no' at first, but he—I guess I was just sorry for him. I suppose I am rather a——"

"Marian," he begged, "please don't go on being unhappy about what I said last night. I was a fool."

But somehow he felt futile. The air fanned a warm and mellow fragrance from the roses all about them. It set swaying, pendulumwise, a little, round, gold box that swung on a gold chain from Marian's finger—her dorine, she had told Drew that box was. The breath of breeze stirred, too, Marian's soft hair about her oval face and sent her silken clothes whispering and melting along her limbs.

Harbeck offered to take half the party to the country club. Marian, at the helm of her gray runabout, invited Wallie Keister in beside her. Her eyes signaled Drew's with banners of brave intention. Then Marian's mother said never mind, Mr. Drew shouldn't drive alone. He put her in his car, and they were the last to leave.

It was in the last miles of their going that they drove down into that valley where pain was waiting for them. From afar, Cotter Drew saw that there was trouble; saw the little, dark huddle in the road just beyond the bridge; saw men running out of the red-roofed farmhouse near at hand; saw a dog run with them, but stop inside the farmyard gate, barking; saw a woman on the porch look under her hand, her apron blowing and as white in the sun as sails are. The woman in the car with Cotter Drew was talking. He was to have Marian to himself to-day as much as he liked, because Marian never danced on Sunday, out of respect to her mother's wishes, that was, and she, Marian's mother, supposed she really was behind the times, but——

"Oh," she cried out sharply as the running men reached the huddle in the road, "do you think some one has been hurt?"

They were rolling over the bridge by this time.

"I'm afraid so," said Cotter Drew, slowing his car.

She covered her eyes, but he could not spare her. The broken shape lay exactly in front of them. It was that of a thin old man in a black suit, a very old man with quite white hair, or it would have been quite white but that it gathered dirt as the head moved from side to side. Across the road, thrown there as he went down, lay a walking stick. It drew the eyes oddly. Old as it was, its handle still remembered the tree from which it was cut. It seemed, somehow, pathetic in itself. It was brown with age, smooth, too, particularly the handle. Drew sprang out. The farm men bent over the figure in the road. They wore dark trousers and very clean shirts with bright suspenders over the shoulders. They would, of course. It was Sunday. One decried the guilty car.

"Wobbled like it was drunk and then went flying," he said.

Then he blamed the other for being at the barn, out of hearing, when the old man was run over, and the other blamed him for not calling louder.

They both shouted, although they stood close together, shouted harsh, useless things. Drew picked up the stick. The handle was smoother even than he had supposed, like ivory or, no, more like those little marble figures in wayside shrines, fondled ceaselessly, glossed through ages by daily human touch. One of the farm hands was a gigantic fellow with a thick throat. He kept begging the old man to speak to him.

"Papa, papa, don't you know Os?"

It seemed strange that the spare, broken little shape could have fathered

that hulk; odd, a little foolish, for the great hulk to have grown past middle age calling the other "papa." Drew spoke to the farm men. He would like to help, get a doctor, maybe, help carry the old man into the house.

The big man straightened and looked at Drew for the first time. He was red, angry. Angry at Drew? That couldn't be. But, yes—

"Help! You help, young fellow! What's your name?"

"Cotter-Drew."

"You help, Mr. Cotter Drew, by taking yourself and your shiny automobile out of my sight."

It was the car that angered him, then. That was unjust, but understandable. One couldn't resent it. Drew fingered the stick and was silent. The big man called Os sent the other farm man hurrying into the house for a cot, then ran after him a little way, calling directions for telephoning a doctor to come at once to Willowdale Farm. Drew looked down. The old man's fingers were opening and closing. Then the hand swept a little groping arc in the dust on the road. Maybe he wanted his stick. Drew bent to give it to him. The fingers closed on the polished handle, and something like peace came over the tortured face. The eyes opened.

"Closer, come closer," said the old man. Drew bent down. "Six threes," said the old man distinctly, "six threes, damn 'em."

"He was trying to tell me something," said Drew to the big man called Os, who came back just then, "some numbers."

"I guess," said Os, "I guess there's not much for him or me to say to you and your kind—running down old men and driving on, red wheels spinning! I guess you'd better just drive on, too, drive on and take your pleasure." Still Drew lingered. "An accident," said the man, a little less truculently, "is an accident, but running away!" He

gulped and pointed to the hill ahead, empty now, but evidently marked for him yet with ineradicable taint, the remembered vision of a fleeing automobile. "Running away up that hill, with him lying here. That—that hill's what a man can't forgive."

"No," said Drew, "I suppose not."

He went back to Marian's mother in the car. As he drove, circling carefully out of the road, he saw that the old man had lost his stick again and was feeling about for it. It lay only a few inches away, but he could not find it. Then they swept on and up, out of that valley, up the unforgivable hill. From that eminence they looked across at the country club, warm-hued, glowing, beyond its emerald links. On the links they saw the golfers bloom many-hued, blue and rose and gold, enchanted poppies dappling the unreal green.

Afterward, on a broad veranda overlooking the unreal field of animate poppies and the road where the automobiles came without ceasing, Marian's mother rehearsed what she called their dreadful experience. The rest found that experience absorbing. People who have never really lived, Drew accused them in his soul, sucking at a bit of excitement. The Munworthy girl couldn't break away to golf, though Trent stood beside her all accoutered, but, instead, sat on the arm of a willow chair swinging her foot as she brushed aside the cluttered narrative of Marian's mother and urged Drew to talk. Even Harbeck sat forward, thrusting in questions. Ann Pezant didn't say much, but the way she lit one cigarette after another showed that she was fascinated. Marian was dancing at first, a fact which, for her mother, all but obscured the epic, but, seeing them through the big, open doors, she came out and sat down, too, very still and quiet, beside Cotter Drew. Keister, following, did not sit down, but stood, arms folded, listening like the rest.

"And, as I often say, the kindest intentions are misunderstood by that sort of people," Marian's mother said. "There was Mr. Drew offering to do anything, anything at all; and this man—he seemed to be the son of the man that was hurt, didn't you think, Mr. Drew?—this man actually resented it, treated him exactly as though he were intruding."

"Oh," said the Munworthy girl impatiently, "one wouldn't offer expecting any special thanks."

"But resenting Mr. Drew's wanting to be helpful!"

"What I can't get," Trent interrupted without apology, "is the particular genus of cur that could drive on and not even pick the old fellow up."

"Yes," said the Munworthy girl, "I don't know but that's the beastliest thing I ever heard. Not one drop of sporting blood!"

"Stupid, too!" This from Harbeck. "Any fool would know that would damn him with a jury."

Followed some discussion of penalties. Drew's mind drifted. People are queer. You think they're being sympathetic, then suddenly you find they've never got out of their shell. One point of view, just one, owners and drivers of shiny automobiles—

"Cotter," Marian was speaking under her breath. "Cotter, what was it about the stick?" He told her. He liked her wanting to know. It seemed important she should understand. "Slick," she said. "You've said that three times. Why would that matter?"

"I don't know. It just got me. So old, you know. The old fellow must have cut it when he was young, maybe when the beefy-necked son was a kid, maybe before he was born. Always had it around, must have, to make wood as slick as that. Reached for it when he was down. I guess it seemed like a part of him, a leg or something. Poor old duck."

Marian's gaze was glued to him. She touched her lips with the tip of her tongue. Out of nowhere at all, for no reason at all, a breath of horror blew upon Cotter Drew. Formless, he would not let it form.

"He'll need his walking stick—never again?"

Her hat had a pompom of silken fluff under the brim, just above her ear. It gave her an elfin look, like a fairy who had decked herself in a dandelion puff or a bit of rabbit down. She shook her head from side to side sadly as she said "never again," and the ball of white fluff quivered with her short hair.

"Never, I'm afraid," said Cotter Drew.

"Poor old—duck," murmured Marian.

Drew stared at her. As from far away he heard her mother, still the bard of blood and epic things, and heard the others like a chorus to her tale.

"So he tried to tell some numbers. How interesting, like a play," said Ann Pezant. "It might lead to anything. Missing papers, maybe; a life-insurance policy——"

"Or a safety-deposit box with the hoard of a lifetime in it," some one added.

No one asked Cotter Drew what the numbers were, and he didn't say.

"But he cursed when he said it," said Marian's mother. "I couldn't hear any of the words, but I heard his voice rise quite sharply. You did say he cursed, Mr. Drew?"

"I think so," said Cotter Drew.

Still looking at Marian, he saw her eyes, already wide, widen more. Harbeck had brought the makings for cocktails. Now the tray of glasses was going around. Drew took one. Marian took one. That was strange, unprecedented.

"What did he say when he cursed?" she asked Cotter Drew.

"'Damn 'em,' I think. Yes, that was it. 'Damn 'em.'"

Marian touched her lips to the unwonted glass. The little white fluff at her ear quivered and was still.

A bit after that the epic grew stale, and their party merged with other parties. The Munworthy girl was off to her golf, Ann Pezant made a fourth at somebody's bridge, Marian went in with Harbeck to dance, everybody scattered. Keister walked away to smoke. Drew followed him. He was beginning to feel, though still without just cause, a painful thirst for the clear air of truth, like a man too long in languorous, perfumed rooms.

"Oh, Keister," he began awkwardly, "I don't know whether Marian told you—"

Keister turned around. His face was very red, and he fumbled his match so that it went out.

"Not altogether. She—she started. When we were driving over. She didn't finish. But I pretty well know. A fellow feels a thing like that coming. Of course, it hits me."

Drew tried to say what he had been planning to say. How he'd have stayed out if he'd known—from the very beginning, that is. But the engagement being unannounced—oh, well, damn it all, don't you see by the time he was intimate enough with Marian to have her confidence it was too late.

"Yes," said Keister. "No good talking."

"But it's tough on you. I feel rotten about it."

"Yes," said Keister. "I'll look rather an ass, won't I?"

"It's really rotten that we waited to tell you." Drew wouldn't say Marian waited.

Keister stood very still, his arms folded in that fat, tight way he had, that pulled his coat about him like a sausage skin. He was puffing hard on

the cigar he had managed to light, after all. It was a fat, round cigar.

"Marian," he said, after a long time, "I guess Marian's pretty soft-hearted."

Out of nowhere again blew that little ghostly wind to play over Cotter Drew's heart.

"Yes," said Drew.

"She just couldn't face the music," said Wallie Keister.

Then Marian came out to them. She must have danced only one dance. Her eyes were very blue under the white brim of her hat, and the little snowy fluff kept quivering at her ear. She dragged off her hat and fanned herself with it. Her hair was damp over her brow. Marian's mother had said Marian never danced on Sunday. But to-day she had danced, to-day she had accepted a cocktail.

"Isn't it funny," said Marian, "that people will make themselves uncomfortable dancing on such a hot afternoon? Wallie, I want my doring. It's in the car, in the door pocket on my side. You don't mind too much?"

"Let me," said Drew, getting up quickly. He knew she was sending Keister so that she could speak to him, but he wanted to get away, anywhere.

"But you don't know where I parked."

"I can find out."

He limped a little as he went down the broad steps. Almost at the bottom he stopped suddenly, halted, after all, by a strange compulsion. He found he couldn't bear going out to Marian's automobile because it had red wheels.

"Keister!" he called, but Keister didn't answer, didn't seem to hear. He was talking to Marian, talking hard. Marian, drawn back against the balustrade, was shrinking away from him so that she seemed to lean backward. "Oh, lots of cars have red wheels." Cotter Drew reminded himself, and went on down the steps.

He rounded the building and saw,

parked in ordered rows, dozens and dozens of shiny automobiles. He found, with no particular difficulty, Marian's polished gray runabout. Its bicycle wheels gleamed red. But so did the wheels of the big green roadster next to it. He was about to step between the two red-wheeled cars when the license numerals on the back of Marian's arrested him. Six threes!

Cotter Drew stood still. The cold wind on his heart was no longer ghostly. It was real, an icy blast of unwelcome thoughts. He recalled, forced himself to recall, a white head turning this way and that, gathering dust, and fingers groping for a smooth-handled stick. "Poor old duck," he had said just now, and she had said it after him.

He walked around to the left of the car, her side. He remembered how she had leaned her two arms along the wheel and bent out to call to Wallie Keister before they had started from home. She had called Keister, but her eyes had sought Cotter Drew, and they had signaled to him.

"See," those eyes had said, "I'm not—what you said last night. I'm brave. I'm taking Wallie Keister to tell him, to prove to you——" But she hadn't told Keister, by Keister's own report, only started telling him. Maybe the accident had stopped her. Or maybe it was only that she found it too hard. She gave it up, anyway.

He put his hand in the pocket and felt for her *dorine*, the golden box on a golden chain. Its cover was wrought delicately of *cloisonné*, tiny rosebuds set in cerulean blue. Drew cradled it in his palm. He touched the shining roses with the tip of his finger, the same finger that had tested the smoothness of the stanch old stick.

He didn't take Marian her toy. He couldn't. He walked, a terribly long way for a man with a groggy knee, past the green that bloomed so magically and over the hill which the farmer

had said a man could not forgive, walked even to the bridge and the red-roofed farmhouse. He saw men sitting on the narrow porch, chairs tilted back to the wall. They maintained an unyielding row which admitted no such human pliancy as their presence hinted. Drew stood in the road, and the big man called Os came out to him. Drew asked how the old man was now.

"Living, he's living." Drew was silent, looking down indifferently at his dusty shoes. "A detective's coming," said the farm man after a bit.

"You might send him on to me at the country club. I'll make a statement."

Another silence. That number hadn't crossed Drew's lips. It was still his secret. A little longer and he must give it up. But not yet. Drew saw in the weeds, where passing wheels had spurned it, the old man's stick, and again he picked it up. He handed it to Os, the son. Os, curiously, whirled it about, sent it singing through the air, past the buttress of the bridge, past the green willows. Drew heard it lash the water. There was finality in that, complete finality. Marian's "never again" echoed. Drew went back up the long hill.

He met a car or two coming away from the country club. The afternoon was ending. The west veranda was in a stir as he went up. He met Marian's mother. She sent him to look for Marian. He went inside and found her with Keister in a chimney-corner seat at the far end of the big hall. Keister was bending over her, talking. They must not have seen Drew approaching, because Keister talked on, and Drew heard part of what he was saying.

"But it would be a nasty thing to go through life branded as a coward," urged Keister. Drew saw Marian shrink away, shaking her head, even saw that little puffy thing under her hat shake. "A woman's conscience——" Keister broke off with a shrug.

And then Drew spoke to them, proclaimed his mission.

"Go ahead, please, Wallie," said Marian. She beckoned Cotter Drew, laying her palm on the seat beside her. "I'll just stand, thank you."

"Oh, I thought—well, it doesn't matter. You stayed so long. I had something I wanted to ask you." She stood up; then, and came nearer. She seemed absurdly small, standing only breast-high before him, looking up, head tilted birdwise. "It's this, Cotter: Even if keeping quiet is a lie, mightn't it be best sometimes to keep quiet, anyway, if telling wouldn't really do any good at all, would just make some one horribly uncomfortable?"

He might try to reason with her, might try to compel her secret, so slenderly cloaked in hypothesis. But he didn't want to. He felt cold, aloof.

"We can't play conscience to each other," he said dryly.

She turned away, disappointed, sighing a little.

"It makes it hard," she said, "to have to decide things alone."

He followed her to the veranda. Marian's mother was just sending Harbeck to find Ann Pezant. The Munworthy girl and Trent came up, hot and wilted, from the links. The sun was setting in a mass of brilliance. Clouds like molten lava were piled across the heavens. The spreading green earth and the golfers were no longer vivid, but a momentary, luminous look crept over the people near at hand. The Munworthy girl was ruddy. Drew looked at the rest and saw that they were flushed, too.

"Dinner will be good," said the Munworthy girl.

"Why, you poor boy!" Marian's mother pitied Cotter Drew. "You're dusty and tired!"

"I went back—yonder," he said.

"But why must you walk?" put in

somebody whom he didn't bother to answer.

"How is the old man?" That was Marian speaking, very low, her little, oval face tender with concern.

"Living," said Cotter Drew, as the farmer had said to him; "he's living." Then, obscurely prompted, he told about the stick, how it was thrown away as useless, how it hit the water.

Marian's lips trembled, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Oh, it's really better that he should die," said Ann Pezant briskly as she came up to them. Her pale face glowed, too, with that roseate reflection out of the west. "Did you ever try plays, Mr. Drew?" Try plays? It seemed so utterly meaningless he could only echo her. "Writing them," she explained. "You have a sense of the dramatic, I think."

"Have they got a clew?" asked Harbeck. He'd been concerned with penalties all along, Drew remembered.

"A clew? Well, that number the man told me, you know. It might be the license number of the car that ran over him."

There was a sharp intake of breath somewhere in the group.

"By George!" said Harbeck. "And you've reported it?"

"I shall, of course. No, no one knows it yet, but me."

There was a little stir of excitement. The Munworthy girl said she only hoped the poor sport would get his. Harbeck wondered how long it would take the police to run him to his hole. Wallie Keister spoke to Marian under his breath. Ann Pezant said if that number should prove to be the clew it would be an astonishing piece of poetic justice.

"But, really," said Marian's mother, "it may seem foolish of me, but I can't help feeling sorry for the person who had the accident. It's the sort of thing that might happen to anybody."

Wallie Keister lit a cigar and walked down the veranda. The Munworthy girl was angry with Marian's mother. "Mush!" she cried. "Didn't he drive off?"

"But," protested Marian's mother, "that was just one impulse. It hardly seems fair to condemn him utterly. Maybe if we just understood exactly why——"

"Pshaw!" said the Munworthy girl, squaring her shoulders. "Wasting sympathy on a coward."

Even her bluntness seemed puny to Drew, merely the shadow of reality. Dinner was mentioned again. Drew said he'd have to wait for the detective, asked Harbeck about taking Marian's mother along in the roadster. Discussion of whether Marian's mother wouldn't crowd poor Mr. Harbeck too much, but whether dinner could possibly materialize if she were late, whether poor Mr. Drew should be left to drive alone. It all seemed quite remote to Cotter Drew, just shadows. He was tired. He drew a chair to the balustrade and sat down, facing the west. He was realizing that Marian was no longer with the others. The mere fact of her vanishing like that made a cold dew spring out upon his lip.

He felt for a handkerchief, touched her *dorine* in his pocket. He would have to give it to her, have to look into her wide eyes again. At the barest mention of a *clew* and a detective, to Drew the only really immaterial phase of the whole sad business, she had slipped away. She would ask him for the *dorine*. Maybe the moon would make shadows on her hair as it had last night. Maybe she would say, as she did then: "If we think uncomfortable, horrid things like that about each other it will make a difference. Tell me, Cotter, won't it make a difference?" The talking kept him from thinking. He must think. He got up.

"But if the maids shouldn't know

about going ahead with dinner, then everybody would be uncomfortable," said Marian's mother, "still it really seems a shame about Mr. Drew." She looked from Ann Pezant to the Munworthy girl. "If one of you——"

"Please don't bother," said Cotter Drew quickly. "I may be detained indefinitely. I'd like it much better if no one waited with me."

Outside, he walked up and down, watching the cars back out and roll off in a steady stream. Twilight was filtering down. Most of the cars flashed on their lights. A chauffeur cried out angrily. Though he had right of way, a little, hurried automobile almost backed into his running board. Cotter Drew stood still to watch. The erring car, a runabout, careened and wavered as if guided by unsteady hands. It leaped into the drive, struggled to pass the car ahead, insisted on passing. An incoming motor cycle tried to bar its way, the rider shouting an authoritative "Halt!" But the runabout sped on, weaving its uncertain, crazy course through the steady file before it.

Marian's mother stopped to say good-by to Drew.

"I don't know where Marian is," she said. "Will you see if Wallie is looking after her?"

Then they were all gone, their voices dying away down the walk; and a man, dismounting from a motor cycle, was asking him where he could find Mr. Cotter Drew.

"I am Cotter Drew." The detective was fuming about the bird that had just made a get-away; about the sin of speeding; about the inevitability of the bird's punishment because he, the detective, had got his number. After a moment, though, he settled to business, referred to the accident called the Willowdale Farm accident, asked Cotter Drew the questions Drew expected to be asked, and heard Drew answer as he had expected to answer. All this was

of a piece with the shadows. Reality was something else. Then came the question about the numerals.

"Six threes," said Cotter Drew.

The detective stared at him, echoed the numerals, whistled, sprang up the steps. He made a stir like some agitated marionette. Drew followed him mechanically and heard him tell headquarters, by telephone, how he'd just missed arresting for speeding the very bird who had run away after the Willowdale Farm accident.

Unimportant. This would have excited Harbeck or Ann Pezant or the Munworthy girl in their several capacities of judge and critic and umpire of life. But to Drew all that mattered was this indisputable truth: the little speeding runabout which, his own eyes saw, was marked with six threes, that fleeing, craven thing, wholly unlovely, was Marian's.

He went outside upon the empty veranda.

Is anything unforgivable? Yes, of course, running away! A man who's been a soldier can't forgive that—anything else—not that.

He took from his pocket the little golden box and turned it over in his hand. The roses and the sky-blue circle were dim. He studied it in the dusk. Then he whirled it about as Os, the farm man, had whirled that stanch, now useless stick, whirled it, and sent it singing through the air. It seemed to carry away with it a part of Cotter Drew. It vanished in the sea of blue shadow that had so lately been green golf links. There was finality in that.

He heard his name spoken, and turned.

"Marian!"

"I can't find my car anywhere."

The lights had sprung on inside, and an unshaded window let a shaft of brightness out upon her. She looked up at Drew from under the brim of her hat and sighed. That made the funny

little dandelion puff at her ear quiver. Then throwing away that little box wasn't so—so damn final, after all; dramatic, maybe, but not final.

"It's gone," he said stupidly. "I saw your car leave. But who could have taken it?"

"Why, Wallie, of course. Poor Wallie." Drew remembered she always had been sorry for Keister, from the day when she had first tried to say "no," to him, and found he couldn't bear it. "He wanted to go quickly, so he took my car. He just didn't have time to ask me. Cotter," she asked, "would it matter very much to you if there was something dreadful I could never explain, because of hurting some one else?"

Drew brushed hypothesis aside.

"If you explained about the accident, how could it hurt—Keister?"

His knowing startled her, shook the ramparts of her secrecy.

"Hush," she whispered, "hush. It's my car. It's my responsibility. Every one knows I always drive."

"Every one except me. I know you weren't driving to-day," said Drew, with sudden conviction. He was humble before her sacrificial intent, but still he pressed her, because he must. "I know Keister took the wheel. When, Marian?"

"On the bridge," she moaned. "When we saw the old man ahead. Oh, if he'd trusted me to drive! But he pushed my hands off, crowded me back. And he didn't steer right. He—wobbled the wheel. He was afraid. Poor Wallie."

Hours afterward, in the garden, with moonlight and leaf shadows on her bare head, she chanced to remember her dorine. Drew gulped.

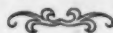
"You lost it!" she accused; but then, when he stammered unhappily, she laid a merciful finger on his lips. "Never mind," she said in soft concern, "don't care too much. What's a silly old dorine?"



"Hello, Marcia!"

By Meade Minnigerode

Author of "The Big Year"



CHAPTER XIX.

MATHEW had not been mistaken in his anticipation of a troubled night, as a result of all these unusual doings, in what was ordinarily one of the best regulated of households.

That his mistress should not have returned from Quinnsickook had not struck him as alarming earlier in the evening and, of course, he was not aware that Philip had been to the Grill Club. But as time passed, bringing with it no return of the lady of the house—only a series of anxious inquiries involving the police, of all people, and culminating in Philip's sudden departure—it became apparent to Mathew that something distressing had occurred, and that, in the nature of things, further disturbing complications were bound to arise.

"There'll be messages," he decided. "As likely as not—by way of inquiry, if not otherwise."

The first of these materialized very shortly in the shape of a somewhat involved communication from Miss Stark, mostly "otherwise," to the effect that, if anybody asked, he was to say that Mr. Blagden had gone to look for Mrs. Blagden, and that Mr. Stark and Mr. White—whoever he might be—were out, too, and that no one was to worry, and that they would probably call up from somewhere if they found out anything.

"Very good, miss."

Of course, Mildred Stark had not stopped with Mathew. Interrupted in the process of retiring for the night by a fur-coated brother clamoring for "coffee in a thermos bottle and the flask on my dressing table," she had witnessed his departure with Duncan, and fallen heir to a jumble of messages to various people which she had done her best to sort out.

"Don't know when we'll be home," he told her. "Go on, beat it back, you'll catch cold out here—and shoot out those messages."

Mildred "shot" them out, one after the other, without too much opposition from Miss Jerome who, by this time, was warming up to her task and listening in shamelessly, and perhaps quite excusably, on every conversation, whereupon a deluge of solicitous voices assailed the ever-ready ear of Mathew.

Was there any news? Had anything been heard? Could one do anything? Would he leave word that one had called?

Mathew was holding his own very successfully, however, carefully adjusting his replies to the degree of intimacy enjoyed by the speaker, minimizing the importance of events in one case and confidentially admitting anxiety in the other; lapsing into polite generalities with one party, volunteering additional details to the next—when matters were taken out of his hands by the sudden arrival of Mrs. Blagden, senior, to all outward appearances as serene as the

First Congregational Church. Certainly, far more so than her cigar-chewing husband who accompanied her.

"Good evening, Mathew," she remarked.

"Good evening, madam."

"Any news from Mr. Philip?"

"No, madam, not any news as yet. Quite a number of calls, by way of inquiry."

"I suppose so," Sarah Blagden said. "Well, just ask Central to say the line is busy except for outside calls, I mean Mr. Philip or Mr. Stark—and Mrs. Crane, of course, and my house."

"Yes, madam." A masterly stroke, it seemed to Mathew, which had certainly not occurred to him.

"Oh, and you might include the police," she added, as the merest of afterthoughts. Her very tone of voice took all the grimness out of the word, as though she had said the Public Library. Mathew began to feel much more cheerful at once. "They'll want to know when Mrs. Blagden has been—has returned."

"Yes, madam." He himself had foolishly imagined that it was the police who would tell *him* when Mrs. Blagden had been—had returned. It took some one like Mrs. Arthur Blagden to set things right, and no mistake!

"Are the other servants up?" she was asking.

"I think so, madam, but I'll ring and make sure."

"Not at all. Send them to bed. I—I'll just wait here for a while with Mr. Blagden. Arthur? Where are you?"

"Mr. Blagden is in the living room," Mathew volunteered. "I've kept the fire going. There's cigars in the library, and some cold chicken laid aside. Madam has only to call, I'll be here in the hall to—answer the door."

Mathew suppressed an inclination to express his own hopeful attitude regarding the situation because, for all

her serene exterior, Mrs. Arthur Blagden was quite evidently not listening to a word he was saying. But her next remark surprised him.

"Cold chicken and cigars, eh?" she observed. "I dare say they'll come in very handy. Now sit down, Mathew, sit down—you look all tired out."

"What did that man say back there?" Dicky Stark asked Duncan suddenly. They had stopped at a crossroad to light cigarettes and investigate the information on a signpost. The clock under the wind shield showed twenty minutes after one.

"Who? Oh, the bird who yelled at us?" Duncan said.

"Yes. It was a cop, wasn't it?"

"I didn't notice. He wanted to know the way to Stamford. I suppose we ought to have stopped."

"Stamford, hey!" Richard exclaimed. "Well, if he's lost, at least he knows where he's bound for, and that's more than we do. Where do we go from here? What does the sign say, can you make it out?"

"Sound Ridge, three miles. West Dover, one mile."

"West Dover! We're much too far inland. We'd better go back and hit a road that will take us nearer Quin-nissikook. What do you think?"

"I think so," Duncan agreed. "She can't have come way out here, if that was the pond we passed back there over half an hour ago. If she—if she's had an accident, it must have been right near Quin-nissikook, I imagine."

"Yes, but where did she leave the main road, that's the question? There's no sign of any accident on the Valley Road, and that's the way she should have come. I mean, if she's really going somewhere, we'll never find her!"

"Well, I'm sure I don't know. If you want to know what I think, I think we'd better get back some place where we can telephone and find out if there's

anything new. She may be home by now!"

"Yes, I guess you're right. Come on, we'll try and strike the Grill Club, it's the nearest place I know. I think I've got the key—yes, here it is."

"Gosh!" Duncan laughed wearily. "It doesn't matter what's on your mind, you always get hungry, don't you! I could do with a bite to eat, too."

"We'll find something there, lot of hot dogs left over. Wonder where poor old Phil is?"

"I hope he's found her," Duncan grunted, settling down in his seat. "But he doesn't deserve to—oh, I oughtn't to say that—we don't know what may have happened."

Dicky Stark turned the car around and started back down the hill.

"Oh, Philip's all right," he said. "He was simply all up in the air. You'd have been up in the air, too, I bet, if you had still been crazy about Marcia and had found her married to somebody else."

"Is that what made you think of *Enoch Arden*? Well, I was knocked cold for a while, I must say," Duncan admitted. "Gosh! When I realized I was engaged to her, and I really cared for another girl—before I knew she was married! Mary Ransom didn't tell me, you know. I kept talking about Marcia Crane—"

"Oh, Mary Ransom!" Richard exclaimed. "Some one will slip her a good dose of wood alcohol one of these days and finish her off. Who's this other girl of yours, Dunc?"

"Oh, just a girl I met—I'll tell you all about it afterward, Dick. We've got to find Marcia, now, that's the first thing."

"All right, old man. I was just—just talking."

They fell silent, then, for a while, each one gazing at his side of the road, snuggling down against the cold.

6—Ains.

And so the Greenchesters—Greenchester Beach, Greenchester Village, Old Greenchester—watched slowly through the night, eagerly vigilant each in its own way, with many a lighted window to betray its wakefulness, many a sound of hurrying footsteps along the asphalt pavements to reveal the passage of anxious souls bent on sympathetic errands.

The Beach made coffee, and smoked incessant cigarettes, pacing up and down in front of its living-room fires, spending fruitless minutes at its telephones, arguing the best, fearing the worst, going across to Sam's or just around the corner to Dorothy's, and then coming back again and shaking its head.

"They've been trying to get the Blagden place for half an hour—line's always busy."

The Village growled at its children, told its wives to stop bothering, and went out to stand on street corners, down to Garrett's and over by the station house, where it stamped its feet, gave its opinion, discounted the efforts of the authorities, and recalled lugubrious details of similar occurrences in the newspapers.

"There was that girl down to Mount Vernon last year—never found hide or hair of her—there weren't no suicide in it, I tell you, I worked with a guy had a married-sister lived next door to her." The Village was flatly pessimistic, with a distinct leaning toward the mysterious.

And over in Old Greenchester, in the cheerless living room of the little "whited sepulcher," they sat and stared at one another, husband and wife, mother and father and daughter. Loomis was supposed to be somewhere around.

They sat in a terrible silence, those three—Eliza Crane and Roscoe and Adele—a silence of self-accusation and mutual reproach, withered fruit of the

barren years between them, sown with ill-will, garnered in discontent. Now, when at last the bond of a common dread should have transfigured the dismal room into a stronghold of affection and sympathy, they had no kindly word to formulate, no hand with which to lift up sinking hearts, no courage to be brought into the breach of each other's anxious misgivings.

Marcia was gone, little Marcia as she had always been, even though the eldest of the children, the one who alone had found pleasure in their unlovely home and brightened its drudgery with a smile—she was gone, caught up in the toils of a trouble into which they had forced her, gone from their threshold in anger and disillusion.

If she should not return now, then upon each one of them must fall an equal burden of the unforgivable remembrance of the wrong done to her—the ruthless championing of heartless doctrines, the sordid demands upon her generous loyalty, the shameless belittling of her unappraisable gift, false counsels, unworthy thoughts, heedless insults!

"Nix on the sob stuff, cutie!"

And for Roscoe, the realization of a timorous acquiescence, the failure to protect his little Marcia from the consequences of his inability to provide for her, the futile absorption in fictitious dramas, when with his own hands he had fingered the elements of a personal tragedy, and uttered the opening words of its chronicle with his own lips.

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"

"I do."

And, with it all, a steadily-rising rage against Mary Ransom, unfounded and unjustified, as far as his own knowledge went, but relentlessly instinctive.

So they sat for a long time, imprisoned in their comfortless thoughts, until at last Mrs. Crane began to speak.

"We must get her back," she said. "If it's only for a minute, we must get her back, so we can tell her——"

She stopped speaking abruptly, and Roscoe stirred clumsily in his chair.

"There, Eliza! Don't fret," he exclaimed. "Don't fret! It's all going to come out all right. She'll come back, my dear!"

"Father's right," Adele heard herself saying. "She'll come back all right, and make it up with Philip. You mustn't worry, mother, dear."

And then they were silent again as before, but Adele seemed to understand that something had happened. In those few inadequate sentences, their hearts had spoken for the first time in many days; it was as though their hands had touched, and this new silence was an inspiration. Adele got up and went to the door.

"I'll—I'll make some tea for you," she suggested, and hurried out of the room.

But her mother did not wait for the tea, although she had smiled gratefully at Adele. Perhaps she had guessed that the tea would never come, because Adele was sitting in the dark in the dining room, where no one could see her. At all events, Eliza Crane stood up suddenly and turned to Roscoe.

"I can't sit here," she told him. "I'm going over to the house—perhaps they've heard something."

"I wish you wouldn't fret, Eliza. I'll—I'll come with you."

"No, you'd better stay here, Roscoe. I'll send for you. The walk will do me good, I think. Try and get Loomis to bed, he's around somewhere."

"Yes, my dear. Now don't worry, and—and you'd best put on your rubbers, hadn't you? Wait, I'll get them."

"You were always a great one for rubbers, I declare!" she smiled at him suddenly and, somehow, twenty years seemed to have passed from her voice.

"Oh, poopadiddle, Eliza!" he replied

unexpectedly, and his voice was an echo of her own.

A little while later, in the hall, Roscoe ran into Adele coming out of the dining room.

"Going out?" she asked him.

"Yes," he replied, fumbling with his coat collar. "Mother's gone over to—to Marcia's. It's late, but there's something I've got to do. Had it on my mind all evening. I'll be back soon. Where's the boy?"

"I don't know. I think he went out. He'll be at Virginia's, probably, if he's not down in the village. I think I'll just run over and see."

Roscoe leaned forward rather timidly and tapped her cheek.

"That's right," he said. "It's—it's easier when you're up and doing and not just sitting still. I can remember when Marcia was born— Well, I'd best be doing my errand before mother gets back."

"Yes," she faltered. "We—we'd be lonely without you."

"Really?" he beamed at her over his spectacles. "Yes, well—I'm glad, Adele. Yes, I'll hurry right along."

Adele had been quite right in supposing that Loomis had gone over to Virginia's. In the midst of the general excitement, he had not found it difficult to abstain from bed, and at the first opportunity he had slipped out of the house and over into the grounds of Blagden Place.

Virginia herself, thoroughly awakened to the fact that the air was filled with portents, had only awaited the departure of her parents, cautiously observed through the banisters, to elude the none-too-watchful attention of the servants and betake herself, sweated and overshod, out through the front door into the mysterious night.

Whereupon she had been made aware of the presence of Loomis who was manifesting himself by a series of

hisses from among the shadows on the lawn.

"Hello there, Loomis!" she hailed him. "Your sister's been kidnaped, and every one's having fits."

"Naw," Loomis corrected her. "She's had a fight with your brother, and things are all smudged."

So much for the actual facts, unembellished by sentiment.

"Anyhow, they've told the police"—Virginia went on with her revelations—"and Mr. Stark's out chasing after her. I'm going to stay up all night."

"Not after they catch you, you won't!" Loomis assured her. "I sneaked away from home. They don't know where I'm at. I can stay up as long as I like."

"I don't think so much of that," Virginia informed him. "Anybody can stay up, if they hide. There's no trick in that!"

"You came out here in the dark," Loomis reproved her. "You did, didn't you?"

"I should worry," she remarked. "I told them."

"Yes, you did!"

"I did, too. I left a letter on my pillow—I tell you I did, Loomis!"

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'I have gone to search for my sister-in-law, will not be back before morning, Virginia.' There now, pull in your ears!"

"Gee!" Loomis remarked respectfully. "That's different. Are you?"

"What?"

"Going to search for her? Where you going? Can I come, too?"

"Certainly, I am. I've got my galoshes on, and everything. I'm not all dressed underneath, but on top I am. You can come and help identify her. Maybe she's fallen into a well."

"Naw," Loomis objected coldly. "I don't think she has."

"Well," Virginia conceded. "You can have a theory afterward, if you like."

And on that basis the search for Virginia's sister-in-law was instituted. However, the business of walking backward so as to leave a false track in the snow was found impractical and, on the whole, incompatible with the dignity of detectives. Virginia's suggestion that they get out the dogcart was finally vetoed also, on the grounds of needless publicity. The best method, as advanced by Loomis, was simply to "snoop along."

So they "snooped" to their hearts' content, venturing as far afield as the beginning of Greenchester Street, where Adele suddenly pounced on them and put an end to their nocturnal adventures.

"You're a pair of little idiots!" she stormed at them.

"Now I suppose we'll have to go home," Virginia sighed. "I never have any luck. All right, Adele, splash along."

Sarah Blagden roused from a dream-mocked half slumber to find Mathew standing before her.

"Yes, Mathew, what is it?"

"I beg pardon, madam," he said, "but Mrs. Crane is outside."

"Oh, very well, ask Mrs. Crane to come in. Arthur, you'll find a fresh cigar in the library."

"I'll stay, if you say so, Sarah."

"Well, I don't think you'd better. Now hurry, before she comes."

"I wouldn't know what to say to her," he admitted, as he went to the library door. "I mean, there isn't any news—nothing to talk about, except a lot of things that—that probably haven't happened."

"I'm afraid, on the contrary, there's too much to talk about," his wife told him. "We'll be much better off by ourselves. Oh, come in, Mrs. Crane. I'm afraid you've been worrying yourself to death. Now won't you try and get rested for a bit?"

"I just couldn't sit there at home any longer," Mrs. Crane explained. "I felt I must come and talk to you, Mrs. Blagden. I hope you don't mind."

"Why, of course not, my dear. I'm very glad you came."

"You're very kind. I—I suppose there's no news?"

"No, not yet. Philip called up a little while ago. He had been as far as Stamford. And Dicky Stark telephoned from the Grill Club. Mr. White was with him—that's the young man who returned so unexpectedly this afternoon. They hadn't found anything."

"Oh, I feel that something terrible has happened!" Mrs. Crane exclaimed. "She's gone, my little Marcia's gone!"

"But, my dear"—Sarah Blagden tried to speak cheerfully—"you mustn't imagine things like that. Marcia may have had an accident, run into something, perhaps, but that doesn't necessarily mean anything serious. Why, she may simply have run out of gas!"

"I wasn't thinking of an accident. She's gone—she won't come back!"

"Why, what do you mean? Don't be absurd!"

"She's run away—she's had a quarrel with Philip, and she's run away. She was always headstrong, as a little girl—oh, dear, oh, dear!"

"Then you've heard all the chatter that's been flying around this evening?" Sarah Blagden asked her. "About this White person, and that Philip had found out something or other, and had a row with Marcia out at Quinnsickook? Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it. Pack of lies. He's devoted to her."

"I'm not saying anything against your son," Mrs. Crane explained. "I'm only afraid it's true. I don't know about this Mr. White they're all talking about. But there's something else, and it was all my doing."

"Something else? Nonsense!" Sarah Blagden said again. "You're imagin-

ing things. What could you have done, Mrs. Crane?"

"Oh, you would never think it possible," Mrs. Crane replied. "You wouldn't imagine any one doing such a thing."

"Now, Mrs. Crane, you're all upset—one always thinks of all sorts of things at a time like this."

"Oh, no, it's perfectly true. Mrs. Blagden, I've got to tell you. That's really why I came. Perhaps you can explain to Philip—it wasn't Marcia's fault, it was all mine."

"I don't believe there's a thing, but go on and tell me, if you want to. I know you're just making a mountain out of a molehill."

"Mrs. Blagden, it was I who made Marcia marry Philip."

"You—what's that? What did you say?" Sarah Blagden exclaimed.

"It was I who made her marry him. We were so poor—I knew that he would be a good husband to her—I wanted to see her settled and provided for, and there would be one burden less for us to carry—"

She faltered a second under Sarah Blagden's frowning gaze.

"Of course, there are molehills and molehills," the later said, apparently thinking aloud. "I don't understand yet—what *did* you do, Mrs. Crane?"

"I told her how to manage things so she would have a chance; I told her that, for a girl in her position, a practical marriage was the only one to be considered. I thought that if he saw a great deal of her, and she studied his ways, and—and made herself agreeable to—to you— You see, I'm not hiding anything, Mrs. Blagden!"

"My stars and garters! I think not!" Sarah Blagden told her, and then sat staring at the fire for a long time without saying a word, in a silence which to Eliza Crane seemed to shriek of condemnation and reproach. And yet,

Sarah Blagden had not been thinking of her at all.

"Well, I'll be damned!" she said, after a while. "I beg your pardon—don't you ever swear?"

"I—no, I don't believe I ever do. I never could see the use of it—I mean, I don't understand!"

"No, there's no reason why you should," Sarah Blagden went on. "You say it was you who made Marcia marry Philip, and I suppose you mean that she did it against her will and all that sort of thing. Poor child—poor children, I should say."

"I don't expect you to forgive me."

"Forgive you! Listen to me, Eliza Crane. Do you know what I did? Well, I thought little Marcia would make the ideal wife for my son, and I deliberately threw them together as much as possible for the express purpose of having him fall in love with her."

"You—"

"Yes, I, Sarah Blagden, that's the kind of a fool I am. I don't think there's much difference between us, if you ask me. That's what comes of meddling in an affair of that sort. Now, for Heaven's sake, don't begin to cry, Eliza!"

"I'm—I'm not going to, Mrs. Blagden. We must keep our heads."

"If we've got any to keep—why don't you call me Sarah? I suppose you think I'm very abrupt, but I feel more like kicking myself than crying. Of course, you're a perfect idiot, Eliza, for ever doing a thing like that!"

"I'll never forgive myself."

"Well, the question is whether they will. We're a fine pair of mothers to go to our children and tell them what we've done—and as I see it, I'm just as much to blame as you are. More perhaps, knowing Philip as I did. I did it for the best, of course, and, if anything, that's a worse reason than yours. My husband warned me against

it long ago, but it was only when you spoke just now, that I finally realized the kind of glass house I had built for myself!"

"You're—you're being very generous—Sarah. You're trying to spare me. You know that what I did was worse. If he asked her to marry him, it was because he wanted to, and no meddling of yours had anything to do with that. But when she married him without caring for him, it was because I made her."

"Yes, and suppose you had done nothing, and he had wanted her to marry him after I had shoved her under his nose at every step and she had refused him?"

"That would have been better—better for them both, than her marrying him when she didn't care for him. It's easy to say now, when the damage is done."

"Look here," Sarah Blagden asked her, "do you suppose there is any truth in this tale of Marcia's having been interested in young White before—before all this happened?"

"Oh, I don't know what to think! She never told me if she was."

"He was supposed to have died, you know, in France, and then, this afternoon, he turned up again."

"You don't think——"

"I don't know, Eliza. It seems he talked with her, out there at Quinnis-sikook, just as if they had been old friends. — Mrs. Ransom took the trouble to call me up to tell me that, and as I practically never even speak to her, it must be because she thinks she's dug up a bone of some kind!"

"Oh, my poor little girl!"

"Now wait, Eliza. The reason I asked was this: Why are you so sure Marcia doesn't care for Philip?"

Mrs. Crane leaned forward and seized Sarah Blagden's hands in her own.

"Oh, Sarah!" she exclaimed. "Do

you suppose it could be—something she said the other day. You know she quarreled with all of us, I haven't seen her since, but it was about Philip, in a way. I—I can't tell you about it, not now, but that might have been the reason. If we could only find out! But she's gone now, she's gone! Oh, what can we do?"

"What can we do?" Sarah Blagden repeated bitterly. "We can sit here and wait and hope and pray, that's all. We are two wicked old women, Eliza Crane. We can sit and think about that!"

Late as it was, there were still lights here and there in the Ransom house, lights that shone forth in the company of their neighbors much as bunting is often displayed out of courtesy in a flag-bedecked street. Ostentatious lights, claiming fellowship with those other anxious ones, set to simulate concern, like prudent signatures on a funeral register.

At all events, they were sufficient for Roscoe Crane's purpose.

"There's somebody up," he said to himself. "They'll have to let me in."

And so it was that he found himself in the front hall, arguing with a very sleepy maid who did not think it possible that Miss Mary would receive him at this hour. Couldn't he return in the morning, or leave a message?

"No," he insisted, "I've come to see her, and I'm not going until I have seen her. There's no use arguing about it. My mind's made up. Go to your mistress and tell her I have something to say to her. Don't trifle with me—I mean, do as I say!"

The discussion came to an end, however, with the appearance of Mary Ransom herself, whose speculations on the sudden, tragic twist taken by her precious jest had kept her awake, and sent her out on the landing to listen to Roscoe's angry splutterings. She now

came down the last flight of stairs into the hall and dismissed the maid.

"I'll see Mr. Crane," she said. "What is it that you wish to say to me, Mr. Crane? I'm sorry to hear that Marcia—"

Roscoe came quite close to her and peered at her over his spectacles. Then he shook a trembling forefinger at her.

"You can keep your sorrow to yourself," he told her. "I've no use for it. I'd rather be alone in the world than have the likes of you sympathize with me!"

"Really, Mr. Crane!" Mary Ransom tried to interrupt him, but the sentences were stumbling from his lips, and his anger shone like a beacon in his mild old eyes.

"I'm an old fool," he went on, "and I'm of no account, but I'd rather lose my little Marcia than have a girl like you on my conscience! Maybe you'll be able to put *that* to music and play it on your piano—you haven't sense enough to play the flute, I guess!"

"If you really have anything to say," Mary Ransom began again.

"I have, and I'm saying it," he exclaimed. "And you'll be hearing it long after I've finished telling it. I don't know what you've been up to—you and your letters, and your Duncan Whites—but as sure as the Lord made nutmegs, I know that you're at the bottom of all this trouble that's come to my little girl. You aren't—square, that's what. You're a mischief maker, and your tongue's as crooked as your ways!"

"Mr. Crane, I must ask you to leave!"

"No, you don't have to ask me!"

Roscoe corrected her. "I'm going now, that's what I came for—I mean, I came to tell you I never want to see you again. You go your way, and leave me and mine alone, or you'll— you'll get your comeuppance!"

He turned from her suddenly and

shuffled over to the table in the hall, fumbling in his pocket. Then he looked at her once more, and in that moment there was not lacking a certain dignity about Roscoe Crane.

"I work for honest folks," he said. "And I don't want my paper going to you! There, that's your two dollars, miss. Good night to you."

CHAPTER XX.

It may have been a little after two o'clock—he could not tell for certain because his watch had stopped—when that most disgruntled of mortals, the Greenchester traffic policeman, came upon the debris of the broken fence.

Ever since his departure from the station house, he had bumped and splashed his way up and down hill, over the countryside, through a maze of lanes and roads, some of which could not possibly have led to Rome, and none of which showed any indication of going to Stamford. And, of course, as he had predicted, in a very short time he had succeeded in losing himself more completely "than a flea on a dog's back," according to his own description of the situation.

"We're a couple of marbles, all right, the dame and me," he grunted. "If I stick around long enough, maybe she'll come rolling by and pick me up!"

Then his temper had not improved as a result of that ~~car~~ which had come squelching around a corner, noisily changing its gears, only to ignore his eager call.

"Hi!" he had hailed them. "What's the way to Stamford? What's the way—well, you big bums! Left me flat! What do you know about that?"

There seemed to be nothing to do but start his motor again and trundle along after them, on the general theory that a road down which other people have passed must lead somewhere, whereas these other thoroughfares only seemed to lead endlessly into each other.

It was some time later, after having turned several corners which had appealed to his sense of direction—intent on the discovery of Stamford, as a magnet yearns for its pole—that he suddenly found himself face to face with the splintered remains of a white-washed railing guarding a dangerous bend in the road. The middle section had apparently been torn away, pushed and twisted down over the edge of the embankment, and the broken stumps stood out white and sharp, with the unkempt look of freshly damaged wood. The ground around this wreckage was just a smear of tire tracks, sweeping in a wide curve toward the opening.

"Holy smoke!" he cried as he slowed up. "There's been a bird of a smash-up here, I'll tell the world!"

He dismounted and ran to the gap, pulling out his electric torch which he flashed about over the scene.

"Nothing to it!" he said. "Tire tracks, plain as day—skidded on the turn and crashed through the fence. Holy Pete! How far did they go?"

He went to the edge of the road and turned his light down into the blackness beyond. As a matter of fact, it was neither a very long drop into the meadow below, nor a very steep one. In the foreground, the broken and twisted branches of bushes and saplings showed where the car had slipped and caught as it fell, and at the foot of the slope, in a soggy slough of mud and slush, the car itself was lying, turned over on its side.

"Good night, nurse! May have been there for hours!"

He scrambled down the embankment and ran to the car, and almost the first thing that he saw was the license tag, all scratched and chipped. He stopped to rub off the mud, and whistled.

"There she is!" he exclaimed. "It's the dame—it's her car, anyway. Chances are she was alone, so there's nobody hurt but her."

But the trouble was that he could find no sign of the occupant of the car. From its position in the slush, he assured himself that she could not be pinned under it, and a search among the bushes and along the embankment was fruitless. He found leather cushions and blankets, the tool box, and two baskets filled with crockery and dishes, strewn around where they had fallen, and near the car he stepped into broken glass and crumpled mud guards, but there was nothing else.

"Holy smoke!" he said, scratching his head. "She ain't here—maybe she's come to and wandered off—or else people have been here already and found the body more likely. Now what the hell am I going to do?"

It seemed useless for him to tramp around aimlessly looking for her, he would only get lost and probably never find the car again even, and of course there was no question of trying to see footprints in that mire. He climbed back to the road once more and stood there considering his quandary. Here again, if he went off on his motor cycle to get help he would never be able to locate the place afterward, nor give any adequate account of its whereabouts.

"Hell's barnyard!" he exclaimed once or twice, and then he did a rather sensible thing. First, he propped up his motor cycle and turned on his searchlight so that it blazed straight into the air. Then he leaned against the handle of his siren and lit a cigarette.

"Now then," he remarked. "Go to it—wake up the dead!"

However, it was not the dead, but the living, to whose startled ears came the sound of his signal of distress across the sleeping meadows. The living, in the persons of Dicky Stark and Duncan White, who at that moment were reluctantly discussing the advisability of abandoning their useless search and returning home. They had

pulled up at a crossroad—one of a score or more of similar crossroads at which they had stopped during the night, only this one happened to be the last which Marcia had passed—when suddenly the air became burdened with a steady, snarling sound.

"What the deuce is that?" Duncan exclaimed. "Fire whistle somewhere?"

Dicky Stark held up his hand and listened for a second or two before replying.

"Sounds like some kind of a claxon to me," he said finally. "What do you suppose he's bellowing like that for?"

"Sounds like a tramp steamer whistling for a tug!"

"Can you make out where it's coming from?"

"Over to the right there," Duncan told him. "Just about where that road is headed, I should say—hey, Dick, what's that?"

Duncan was pointing excitedly up the road at a fan-shaped glow, more of a reflection against the sky to be precise, which seemed to come from the farther side of the rise in front of them.

"By jinks!" Richard cried. "That's a searchlight, headlights, it looks like—do you know what that is, that's somebody calling for help! I bet you it's Marcia!"

He was about to turn into the road and make for the light when Duncan put out his hand.

"Wait a minute," he said to him, looking back over his shoulder. "There's somebody coming behind us hell bent for leather. Give your horn a blast."

Dicky Stark gave three vicious jabs at his own siren, and an answering call came from the other car, approaching the crossroad from the opposite direction to that from which they had come.

"Is it?" Duncan asked him.

"I think so," Richard replied. "One man alone in an open car."

In a few seconds, the newcomer was

slowing down abreast of them, and, as they had hoped, it was Philip.

"Hello!" he called to them. "That you, Stark? See the light? I got it coming around the curve back there—yes, that's a claxon. I think perhaps it may be Marcia, she may be stuck."

"We were headed for it when we heard you coming," Dicky Stark told him. "Go ahead, we'll follow you."

And so it was that a few minutes later to the watcher at the bend in the road there appeared out of the night, first, headlights and the welcome sight of rapidly approaching wheels, and then fur-coated men who descended upon him, and shook him by the arms, and shouted a bedlam of questions at him.

One in particular, bareheaded and very white-faced, in evening clothes under his automobile coat, whose hand closed like a vise on his shoulder, while he pushed the others aside to make himself heard.

Had he seen a car? Was there a lady—had there been an accident? This was Mr. Philip Blagden of Greenches-ter—

"Don't stand there like a mummy!"

"You can see for yourself," the policeman said, and pointed to the gap in the fence.

"Oh, my God!" Philip exclaimed. "She's been killed! Where—where is she?"

And then, while the policeman was endeavoring to explain to them the little that he knew about the accident, and how he had not been able to find any trace of the lady, they became aware of a fifth addition to their group. A lantern-bearing farmer's boy who seemed to have come from beyond the bend, and who had been trying to attract attention in the midst of the uproar.

"Say," he insisted, "was you blowing the horn just now?"

"Sure," the policeman answered.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Zeke," he informed them. "I'm from up to the house. Up the road a piece there. We heard you blowing like sixty——"

"Well, what of it?"

"Was you looking for the corpse?"

"The corpse!" Philip gasped.

"Steady, old man!"

"We're looking for a lady who's had an accident," Duncan White told the boy. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Sure," said the boy. "That's what I come to tell you. She's up to the house."

"She's there?" Philip exclaimed. "You say she—she's dead?"

"I guess so," the boy replied. "I don't know," he added almost immediately, backing away. "I ain't seen her close."

"How did she get there?" They were all crowding around him now.

"I don't know."

"Was she found by some of your folks? Did anybody see the accident? Come on, speak up, can't you?"

"I don't know."

"What makes you think she's dead, then? Don't be afraid, kid."

"They put her in the parlor," he explained. "There ain't never any one put in the parlor, excepting it's a corpse. Ain't you coming to the house, then you can see for yourself?"

"Yes, for Heaven's sake," Dicky Stark suggested, "don't let's waste any more time. Come on, Phil, old man, the kid will show us the way."

It was quite true that Marcia had been put in the parlor as the boy had said, but the accuracy of his statements were questionable beyond that point. At all events, it was not for a corpse that the parlor had been opened up in this case, whatever the custom of the house may have been on other occasions. They had simply carried Marcia into the parlor because it was the nearest

room available, and there was a big sofa on which she could rest comfortably without having to be taken upstairs.

Of course, for a while they had actually feared that she was dead. The whole thing had been so startling! They had been sitting up, very late for them, looking at some tractor circulars and half hoping that daughter and Son Jim would get back from the doings over in Stamford before they locked up, although in reality they knew that this was quite unlikely, when suddenly there had been a knock at the door.

"Land's sakes! Who's that knocking at this hour?"

And then, almost at once, the door itself had been pushed open, and they had seen her standing there in the opening, leaning against the door post.

"Sakes alive! What is it?"

It was a terrifying apparition to have walk in upon them like that, out of the night, without any warning—this girl, covered with mud, with her dress torn, her hands cut and blood streaming from a wound in the head, and her white, staring face!

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I've had an accident. May—may I sit down for a——" And then, before they could move to help her, she had swayed suddenly and crumpled up across the threshold.

For what seemed to them an endless time, she had been unconscious, while they were busy getting her into warm blankets and dressing her cuts, and, of course, when they finally got his house on the telephone, the doctor was away, and they had to depend entirely on their own simple resources. When at last she had stirred and opened her eyes again, she had been so weak and bewildered that they had scarcely been able to get a sentence or two from her. Something about an au-

tomobile and a fence, and two baskets of crockery.

"Was there any one with you in the automobile?"

No, she was alone, she had been thrown from the car, and then she didn't remember, but she thought that she had walked—there had been a light, it must have been in a house, but she didn't remember. They must find the basket because the thermos bottle belonged to Marian. Could she go to sleep now, please?

"Yes, my poor child, you shall, right away, but first you must try and tell us where you live."

But she was already asleep, and they had thought it wisest not to disturb her. As long as she was resting easy it was probably the best thing for her, and there did not seem to be any bones broken, by some miracle. When Jim came back with the Ford they could fetch a doctor, and perhaps daughter would know what to do.

"The poor child, it's a blessing she isn't killed."

So they had sat, watching anxiously over this pitiful visitor who had stumbled out of the dark from death's door to their own, and grieving for those who must now be searching despairingly for her, until that sudden wailing cry of the siren had cut through the night, and brought the boy, Zeke, chattering from the barn.

Philip was the first to reach the house, although the others were not far behind him. The boy had abandoned them beyond the bend when the lights came in sight.

"That there is the house, and I guess the dog's loose, but he ain't mean," he informed them, and returned for a more detailed inspection of the wreck, certain features of which had appealed in the highest degree to his morbid instincts.

"Where is she?" Philip cried, as soon

as he had stepped inside the door.

"Where's my wife?—Is she alive?"

"She's in the parlor there," they told him. "Praise be you've come, if you're the poor child's husband——"

"Is she alive?"

"Heaven bless us, yes! There's no cause to take on, young man, the poor thing's resting nicely, considering it's a miracle she isn't killed."

But Philip had already stumbled to the other door, with the sudden, sharp tears of overwhelming relief streaming down his cheeks.

"In here?" he asked.

"Yes. You'll want to see her alone, I suppose——"

"If only she's willing to see me!" he exclaimed, as he passed through the door, but they had no time to wonder at this unexpected remark, because at that moment the others came crowding in, tripping over each other's heels, and entirely surrounding the little lady of the house who tried breathlessly to answer all of their questions at once and find chairs for everybody.

"Alive?" Duncan White was the first to ask.

"Yes, she's alive, and no bones broken."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "That boy of yours had me petrified!"

"Who, Zeke? No one minds anything he says, but of course we're used to his ways. You're the lady's brother, perhaps?"

Duncan glanced at Dicky Stark with just the flicker of a smile in his eyes.

"Well, not exactly," he explained. "We're just friends, this gentleman and I, friends of the—of the family, and this is the Greenchester traffic policeman. Say," he added, looking at the latter, "you're the man I was talking to this afternoon or yesterday afternoon, whenever it was, aren't you? I didn't recognize you before. This is your busy day, isn't it?"

"Yes." The policeman tried to scowl

at him, but somehow he only succeeded in grinning. "And you two guys are the birds that passed me back there on the road a little while ago, ain't you? I sure had it in for you! Looking for the road to Stamford, I was, and you went rolling by like you was General Pershing on his way to a banquet!"

"Well, we ought to have stopped"—Dicky Stark laughed at him—"but just think, if we had, you would have gone off to Stamford and you would never have found Mrs. Blagden."

"I guess that's right," the policeman admitted, "and I sure am glad we've found the lady. Say, I'd best be reporting to the chief. Can I use your phone, ma'am?"

"Oh," Dicky Stark added, "when you get through, ask them to tell Mrs. Arthur Blagden and Mrs. Crane, and I wish they'd call up my house, too—Stark's. Well, Dunc, old boy, all's well that ends well, how about it?"

"I hope so," Duncan replied quietly, looking at the parlor door, and it occurred to Richard for the first time in several hours that there were other things at stake beside just finding Marcia. Had Philip really found her, at all?

"By jinks, yes!" he said, and took the chair which his hostess had been trying, anxiously, to press on him for some time. Then they sat looking at each other, struggling against the reaction of weariness which was besetting them, until the policeman's remarks over the telephone brought a smile to their tired faces.

"Sure, I found her," he was telling the chief. "Yes, her husband's here and everybody. I'll get all the dope, sure. No, she ain't dead—not as dead as you'd be, I guess, if you'd been out all night doing what I've been doing! Ah, say, you guys make me sick! You couldn't find the Statue of Liberty in an empty field—takes a regular guy like

me to pull them out of the air! I'm some marble, bo, take it from me!"

Marcia was awake when Philip came into the parlor, and her big, round eyes stared at him, startled and afraid, as he stood for a second leaning against the door, gazing breathlessly at her.

"Oh, my darling!" he whispered, and in two steps he was kneeling at her side, fondling the bound-up hands, his trembling fingers hovering above the mop of yellow curls straggling over her bandaged forehead, his eyes caressing every feature of the worn little face, while he stammered incoherent words into her ear.

"My poor darling, are you terribly hurt? Why did you do it, why did you go away like that and leave us? We've been looking for you everywhere. I thought you were dead. Marcia, tell me, do you know me? This is Philip—promise me you aren't going to die! Your poor little hands—why did you run away like that all alone?"

He hid his face in the blankets beside her then, and for a space of time in which a lark might have flown singing into heaven nothing stirred in the little parlor, while Marcia smiled. Then she gently released her hand, and for a moment he felt the touch of her inquisitive fingers upon his hair.

"Oh, dear me!" she said, at last. "Then you're not angry any more, Philip?"

"Oh, my dear, I must have been crazy," he told her. "I think it was because I was so afraid it might be true that you cared for him still, and not for me. I can only tell you how sorry I am, and how ashamed! Will you ever forgive me, Marcia?"

"Philip," she smiled at him, "I—I don't know how—"

"I guess it was really Duncan White who made me see what a fool I'd been," Philip said, after a while. "He told me what you had said to him."

"Poor Duncan," Marcia whispered. "I had forgotten. It's—it's hard on him, Philip. It's unfair, for me to be happy——"

"Oh, but you don't know!" Philip exclaimed. "He started to tell you out there at Quinissikook, but I interrupted him. Wait, I'll get him, he's right out here with Dick—then he can finish what he was going to say." Philip went to the door and looked out. "Oh, White!" he called.

Duncan came in at once and went straight to Marcia's side.

"Well, my dear girl"—he smiled—"what have they done to you? You had us all terrified. Dick's out there, he sent you his love, and the cop said give the lady his respects!"

"Tell them I'm all right," Marcia answered. "It was wonderful of you to come looking for me. Duncan, was there something you wanted to tell me?"

"Yes," Philip put in, "you know, what you were going to say when I came butting in."

"Oh," Duncan said, "yes, I did start to tell you something. Well, now I can finish it." He sat down on the edge of the sofa and took one of Marcia's hands in his. "Marcia," he went on, "listen—what I wanted to say was this—that you mustn't feel, well, sorry for me, that's the only word I can think of, because I'm afraid I've—I've gone and fallen in love with another girl, a girl I met in Honolulu. You see, I didn't remember anything else then, but now that I do remember everything, I find I can't forget her!"

"Oh, Duncan!" Marcia exclaimed. "It's the nurse, isn't it, Doctor Foster's nurse? She has hair just like mine—oh, I'm so glad!"

Duncan turned to Philip and laughed.

"You know, we're a great bunch," he remarked, "we've done nothing except

be glad because the other was in love with somebody else!"

"Well," Philip told him, "I'm going to spend my time from now on being glad because my wife is *not* in love with somebody else, if you don't mind! What do you say, Marcia?"

She looked at him for a moment, and then she began to laugh, too.

"Philip," she said, "this is another *Enoch Arden* solution we hadn't thought of for Archie Craig, isn't it?"

Philip was on the point of saying something, but he never got beyond the first word or two, because just then the door opened and his sentence was interrupted.

"I beg your pardon," said a voice at the threshold. "I thought I'd better come right in. I'm a trained nurse."

Marcia could not see her right away, but she thought that she recognized the voice, and Duncan White whirled to his feet at the first words.

"Marjorie Sims!" he shouted. "What are you doing here?"

She may have been a trained nurse, but for the moment it was quite obvious that she had forgotten all about the patient! She took a step or two into the room and stared at Duncan as though he might be one of the beasts of the Apocalypse.

"Why, I—I live here," she stammered. "This is my mother's house. What—what are you doing here, Mr. Man—from Odessa?"

"Looking for you, I guess!" he laughed. "And, oh, of course, you don't know. My name is White, Duncan White—you'd better call me Duncan and be done with it, Marjorie—Miss Sims, I mean!"

"All right, Mr. White," she teased him. "Well—Duncan, I mean!"

"Oh, dear me!" Marcia observed. "Oh, dear me! What idiots we've all been!"

The Inside Room

By
Clinton Dangerfield

Author of
"The Cup of Comprehension"



NEW YORK CITY spread the splendor of her brilliant tapestry, flecked with the incarnadined leaves of late October, before Jasper Keswick as he gazed out of his window in the Forties off Fifth Avenue.

He was apparently regarding the view earnestly. One might have fancied he was recalling the share his famous forefathers had had in building the metropolis; or, perhaps, that he was reflecting pleasantly on how his own huge city mansion added its quota to the general magnificence. In reality his consciousness was sunk in sodden, tormenting jealousy. The hours seemed to be hammers driving the nails of it daily deeper into his throbbing temples.

He left the window and came quietly back to the mirror before which Isla stood. It was an enormous affair, and the glass was so clear that the reflections it gave back seemed no mirage, but real as life itself.

Looking covertly at Isla, Keswick thought that her soft, warm flesh actually seemed to pulsate and glow with loveliness under the pale chiffon of her shoulder drapery. All the essentials of beauty were in her oval face, in her form, in the lustrous, provocative gayety of her darkly blue eyes with their shading of violet.

She stood before her great mirror, as her maid unfastened her gown, frankly pleased with her own alluring reflection in its clear surface. But Jasper, silently regarding her sensuous,

splendid young charms, asked himself bitterly why he had been fool enough to marry, for the second time, a beauty.

Why hadn't he had the insight of his stepfather, Sir John Lawrence, who also had married twice, who had been happy with his first partner until her death and was now singularly happy with his second wife—Lady Laura Lawrence, Jasper's mother—who amiably admitted that she was the plainest of women.

Across one of the polished chairs of the big, luxurious bedroom lay Isla's tailored riding habit. Jasper glanced at it with no friendly eye.

"I suppose you and Tiernay are off for a long ride?" he asked quietly.

She flashed a mirrored smile at him.

"I never take long rides with him on Sunday, Jasper, because you are at home. We'll only be gone about an hour to-day."

The maid was lifting the filmy gown from her mistress' shoulders. Isla had involuntarily put her small, pink-palmed hands against the dove-smooth curves of her breast, so that the dress could slip easily over her head. Her pliant form was, Keswick thought, as sweetly yielding as a bank of lush grass in June.

She was his wife. Why couldn't she cut out Maurice Tiernay for one day in the week? It was enough to endure his loafing around the house in the capacity of guest. But on Sunday Isla might let him amuse himself. Tiernay was

populas. He often vanished on outside engagements; but he was, Keswick reflected, as sure as death or taxes in his daily ride with his hostess.

The sophisticated maid attiring Isla was secretly considering the same thing. How much longer was Mr. Keswick going to stand for her mistress' audacious experiments? Surely he was too clever not to see what was going on. Why, then, did he permit it? Was he seeking interests of his own outside? Was he tired of his beautiful wife? Antoinette concluded that this was the solution. But she was mistaken on both counts. Jasper had no outside interests; neither had he any toleration for the present situation. He had an idealistic conception of loyalty in marriage—a viewpoint which always makes a potentially dangerous man.

He walked out into the hall, closing the bedroom door with what seemed easy composure. Then he paced slowly up and down, waiting for her, passing and repassing a suit of old armor which his English stepfather had given him. Isla soon joined him in her trousered habit. It gave her a boyish look, but did not lessen her feminine allure. The two went together to the long living room where Tiernay was waiting, a good-looking, blue-eyed blond, whose conventional riding clothes could not disguise the easy grace of his powerfully knit frame.

As the two riders started off together they paused a moment at the doorway.

"Jasper, I wish you and Lady Laura were cracky about horses, too," Tiernay said in his heavy but sweet-toned bass.

"One can't expect to care for everything, Maurice," his former college mate returned quietly. "You two have a wonderful day for your ride, and mother and I have a wonderful book to talk over—'Big Game on the Veldt.' It's Sir John's, you know, and just out."

"I'd rather hear him talk about it when he gets back," said Maurice.

"What news from him to-day, Lady Laura?"

"The mail steamers won't be in till next week," Lady Laura Lawrence answered pleasantly. Maurice, looking at her, was conscious of wondering if Sir John Lawrence, who was a noted shot, had married her because she looked a bit like big game herself; for Lady Laura had little, wise, elephant eyes; like that sagacious beast, her ears were too large, and she had an overmarked proboscis. But she was a fine, frank pal to her husband, brave and shrewd. Sir John loved her dearly.

"Good-by!" cried Isla, smiling at her husband. Her lips, satin red, had a velvety intimacy of appeal. Jasper forced himself to smile back at her, while the very beauty of her mouth tortured him with conflicting emotions.

As the two riders disappeared, he wiped the polite grimace from his lips. To be endured where he had once been passionately loved—the thought had tormented him for days. Mingled with it was a poignant apprehension of some hideous revelation which would more than justify his jealousy of Tiernay. Why had he been idiot enough to ask Tiernay to the house; idiot enough to believe that, because they had been college mates and very genuine friends, their friendship could survive the lure of Isla's beauty? Tiernay, too, was dangerously good-looking in his blond, muscular way. He hadn't Jasper Keswick's brilliant mentality, but when, Jasper asked himself wretchedly, did intellect hold a woman's affection for her husband? Jasper spoke abruptly to his mother. The comradeship between them was so deep that neither needed to introduce gradually an intimate trouble.

"These rides with Tiernay are getting to be infernally regular!" he exclaimed.

Lady Laura jerked her mind from rhinos on the veldt. She put aside her

book instantly, and looked quietly at her son.

"Jasper, the prerequisite to happiness in marriage is faith," she said calmly.

"I tried faith once, thank you, and you know how I was made into copy for the damned yellow journals. Next time, trust me, the laugh won't be at my expense—unless a dead man laughs."

"Jasper, the day you got news of Madelin's drowning you should have canceled all this bitterness; you should have taken up a broader and more just outlook on life."

"Every broad outlook on life includes a recognition of the potential cruelty in women. If Madelin had bolted with that Spaniard alone, I could have forgotten both of them, since both went to the sharks in that storm. But she took my boy—though no one knew better than she how his baby hands held my heartstrings. He was to have been my other self. He wasn't only mine—he was, in a sense I can't explain—*me*. You couldn't understand."

"Oh, yes, I do," she said quietly in her low, tranquil tones. "Because I feel just like that about you, Jasper. You aren't *only* mine—you are *me*. And I loved your baby boy, too. Though he was barely five, he looked like a six-year-old. A splendid little fellow with your eyes, your hair, even your—but what's the use? He went down with them. And if he'd been left to you he might have died here. But, Jasper, because you loved that baby so, you should have been willing to let Isla give you a child."

"Never! The terms on which I married her were 'no children.' I never want to feel that love for a child again! It's putting myself too completely at a woman's mercy."

"Jasper, it's no credit to a man when an injury done him wakes his latent selfishness and causes him to injure some one who has never harmed him."

Her son's plain, distinguished face hardened.

"Just what do you mean?"

"Isla is a beautiful woman, abnormally beautiful—just as Madelin was. But she is not a weak fool, camouflaged by loveliness, as Madelin was. Isla is keenly intelligent. She manages her household well. Her servants obey her. But the gaps in her days—those devil hours which we call leisure—should have been filled by children. She wanted them. This is Sunday, so you are at home——"

"And she's out riding with Tiernay."

"But on week days," his mother went on imperturbably, "you are *not* at home. You are deep in Big Business. So Isla has proceeded to fill up her devil hours with horses. Tiernay is nothing more to her than a riding companion. It's true she's out with him now; but on Sunday her ride with him is only for an hour."

"Very thoughtful of her, I'm sure! But on week days she's out whole afternoons with him. He is lengthening his holiday indefinitely, I notice."

"Yes. And, meanwhile, Isla is getting some real rides with him."

"Have you imagined those rides are always in the park?"

"Yes."

"You are wrong," he said dryly, his long, nervous fingers playing with a carved-ivory paper knife. "They take the ferry to St. George. On Staten Island they get horses. You know what the hills of Staten are. One can get lost in the wild parts—or one can lose certain old-fashioned things, such as—loyalty."

Lady Laura was silent. She was never one to make light of things. She faced every issue directly, and tried to suggest real remedies. Her son rose and paced the room.

It was a room which expressed the fine breeding and the great wealth of its occupants; but the wealth tone was sub-

duced to the selective individuality of the dwellers. The whole large mansion had a hospitable look in spite of its costly furnishings. Plainly, it was a home where people used silk brocades as simply as cotton.

Lady Laura was deeply disquieted. Watching her son, she thought his face had a sinister sadness.

"Let me tell Tiernay privately that his attentions to Isla have been too marked. Let me suggest his leaving, I am certain he would go," she said slowly.

"No. Tell him nothing," Jasper retorted, stopping his pacing to look straight at his mother. His gray-blue eyes narrowed slightly. "Tell him nothing! If she is that sort she would find somebody else in short order. Leave me to deal with this situation after my own fashion—in the wisdom born of past experience."

"Jasper, you alarm me! After all, you are mine. I am afraid you may act rashly. You may jump to conclusions in which there's not an atom of truth."

"There will be no jumping to conclusions. If they are playing fair, no harm shall come to either of them. If they are *not* playing fair, no suave planning shall save them. But don't be afraid for me, mother. If anything is wrong—this time the cards will be in my hands. And I only talked to you about it because I wanted to see what sort of defense you'd put up for her. All you could do, shrewd as you are and partisan as you are to her, was to talk platitudinous piffle about faith."

"Jasper——"

He broke in roughly.

"That stuff about leisure—'devil hours'—is absurd, and you know it! And your calling me selfish because I won't let her have children is not just. I told her before I married her that the bare idea of loving another son terrified me. Little Jasper—mother, it

7—Ains.

sounds weak and womanish, I know, but there are times when I think of the sharks gnawing his fine little body to pieces—and all because—— Oh, damn it! I told Isla all this! She understood. She put her arms around me and called me poor boy and swore she'd never say 'child' to me! And now you tell me she isn't decent enough to occupy herself with her husband and her house!"

"Stop, Jasper! I said nothing of the kind. I only tried to make you feel that children are the safeguard of a wife."

"My wife must need no safeguard. If she does——" He broke off, came over to her, and patted her shoulder affectionately. "I say, chum, it isn't right to worry you with my foolishness. I reckon it is all foolishness. Forget it! You know I've always babbled to you about everything. You know me as nobody else does."

She rose. She was a tall woman, almost as tall as her son. She slipped her strong, loving arms around his neck, with a gesture that was at once a shield and a caress.

"Jasper—boy, chum, be careful for my sake!"

He promised that he would be, but as he kissed her tenderly and left her, Lady Laura looked anxiously across the days ahead. He might promise, but what were promises against the yellow powers of a jealousy which she greatly feared was well founded?

The office of-Freddick & Freddick is downtown, not far from the central activities of Wall Street, and some of Wall Street's manipulated money flows smoothly into their coffers.

They would agree with those who claim that New York City is the wickedest spot in Satan's kingdom, but they would console you by pointing out that in no other city are there such admirable facilities for unmasking evildoers.

Hundreds of divorces have been granted, not because divorce courts exist, but because Freddick & Freddick lent their exceptional services to the complainant. They were all the more useful because they were not venal. If some misguided person set them on the track of one whose real innocence was clouded by the mist of tarnishing circumstances, Freddick & Freddick were sure to dissipate that mist and restore the glitter to all genuine gold.

On the ensuing Wednesday, Freddick, junior, had just returned from Staten Island. His commonplace, pinkish face was redeemed by a pair of amber-brown eyes so searching that he affected drooped lids most of the time. He entered their private office and dropped in a chair opposite his brother. Freddick, senior, passed the cigars and then enveloped his own pinkish face and equally shrewd eyes in a drift of smoke.

"How'd you come out about Mrs. Keswick?" he asked.

"Just as I expected. She's hired a little house in the most isolated part of the Staten Island hills. It's down in a ravine, hidden by thick trees. No roads. Only horses or foot travelers can get to it. She hired the house under the name of Mrs. Mary Smith. It's kept for her by a battle-ax of a woman who calls herself Hodges. She's built like a grenadier and has a face like a middle-aged lemon. The house isn't very large, but I'm certain it has an inside room."

"How'd you go there?"

"As a peddler. You know these Syrian lace peddlers that are all over New York——"

"Go all over the islands, too!" exclaimed Freddick, senior. "Very good idea!"

"Hodges is devoted to her mistress. In spite of selling her lace as cheap as I dared, I couldn't get a word out of her, except that Mrs. Mary Smith lived there. So after I'd departed, osten-

sibly, I turned back, packless, hid, and waited. Sure enough, it wasn't any time before Mrs. Keswick and Mr. Tiernay appeared—thick as canned sardines. I heard her tell the battle-ax she would be back on Friday afternoon at three."

"That'll be Mr. Keswick's chance. You ought to go with him, Sam. She's one of those pestiferously beautiful women who make men do things they're sure to regret afterward, and I like Mr. Keswick."

"I can't go with him unless he wants me. You know our rule, Rawley. No butting in. We aren't running the world. But if Keswick takes to the last remedy, the evidence would see him through with a jury."

"I guess you are right. The Keswick woman can't stall it off by any claim of visiting relations. She hasn't one to her name, except a couple of fortieth cousins, and they wouldn't help."

"I know I'm right. I'm going to advise him to see for himself first, and then take a couple of witnesses along next time. But if he wants to rush matters—well, we don't intrude on clients. I think——"

The house phone rang.

"Mr. Keswick to see you, sir."

"Show him in." He put down the receiver. "I thought he'd be here to the minute." As Keswick entered, they both rose, then Rawley tactfully effaced himself, closing the door firmly behind him as if to say, "You are shut in with discretion itself." Sam sat down again and Keswick took the chair opposite him.

Inwardly, Keswick was squirming with disgust at the means he was using to satisfy himself, and he was tortured with piercing fear lest the means be only too well justified. As he listened mutely to Sam Freddick's report, Keswick's disgust was lost in a vortex of fury, all the more profound for his external self-control.

He listened calmly to Sam Fred-dick's advice that he should be patient; should make a second visit there, with witnesses. With the same outward poise, he heard the sharp ticking of an insistent clock over the mantel and the yawn of a sleepy terrier. Sam Fred-dick, who had spoken in a low, expres-sionless voice, had expected just such surface self-restraint in his client. But that present self-restraint did not lead Sam Fred-dick to consider Tiernay as a good bet for a straight-life insurance agency.

"Do you desire any further investi-gation, Mr. Keswick?" he asked in his expressionless voice. As he spoke, he pushed the open box of cigars silently toward Keswick, and Keswick as si-lently ignored the hospitality.

"No, I need nothing further, except that you keep your promise of secrecy." Jasper rose and looked down gravely at his lawyer.

"Until you ask me to break it," Fred-dick answered.

"I would like to settle now," Kes-wick continued, taking out his wallet. "I have come prepared, hoping this would be the last time I should need to be here."

A vague hint of his loathing of the place crept unintentionally into his voice. It made Fred-dick wince. But he was used to this and merely named the large sum asked for his excellent service. Keswick immediately paid in high-denomination bills, and promptly left the office.

When he reached his handsome home his lips were set with decision. At three o'clock Friday afternoon he would be among the thick trees of Staten Island, watching for the arrival of "Mary Smith."

Meanwhile, Isla met him with teas-ing tenderness of voice and gesture. He looked at her dully from a gray face. Strange creatures—these beauti-ful women! So clever in their self-

control; so foolish in not realizing that Fred-dicks exist!

"Why, Jasper! Are you ill?" Isla exclaimed as he came into the light.

"I've a splitting headache. I'll be all right in the morning. I'm going to sleep in one of the guest rooms. See you at breakfast."

"I'm coming to put some hot water on your head."

"No. I'd rather not. I just need quiet. If you were with me I might—talk."

Isla came down to breakfast the next day in the most charming of mandarin coats—the fad of the hour. Lady Laura and Tiernay were already there. Tiernay was absorbing toast, bacon and eggs, and coffee with healthy diligence. He sprang up to place a chair for her. As she seated herself, he looked down at the soft nape of her white neck and jerked his thoughts away from a mad impulse to stoop and kiss it. Jasper, just entering, caught the look on his friend's face. For half a second Kes-wick paused. Then he came forward easily, pleasantly answered all greetings, and sauntered to a chair so calmly that Lady Laura felt a sense of relief.

All through the day Jasper doggedly attended to his business affairs. Once or twice he gave strange answers to his associates, answers which made them think Keswick needed a bit of fishing or hunting, by Jove. Or p'r'aps golf. The market was getting to be the devil on a man's nerves, anyway!

He himself was not aware of his absent-mindedness. He was busy with heart-shaking thoughts, with surges of dreadful anger, the more profound be-cause it lay so far beneath his courteous surface.

At the end of the day he telephoned Lady Laura a gay little message about being detained. She felt a sense of dis-quietude which puzzled her, although she answered as gayly. She even be-

gan to question her own wisdom in always keeping her son's confidence. Would it not be better to break her promise, just this once, and try to make Tiernay leave? But her invariable common sense answered sturdily that if Isla were, as Jasper had said, "that sort," sending Tiernay away could only mend matters for a little while.

She took up another book on exploration and was disconcerted to find herself reading about the polyandrous Todas, who allow five husbands to each wife. Lady Laura had a deep suspicion that many women are naturally as polyandrous as many men are naturally polygamous. She herself was, and had always been, a faithful, idealistic mate; but she was too sophisticated to measure all types by her own. She threw the book aside petulantly and paced up and down as her son had done, thinking of Isla.

When Isla came in Lady Laura delivered Jasper's message, and wondered anxiously whether the girl's exclamation of dismay was mere pretense. Certainly Isla turned from dismay quickly, greeting a caller with buoyant brilliancy. Tiernay lounged around the room, then came over and talked with Lady Laura. But his eyes wandered covertly to Isla, and again that feeling of disquietude came into her mother-in-law's mind; again she felt an inner, imperative urge to get rid of Tiernay at any cost, and once more she resolutely put the feeling aside.

None of them saw Keswick that night. He was pacing the room he had taken in an obscure downtown hotel, as sleepless as he was anguished. He could not go home. He felt that another period of conventional waiting would drive him utterly mad. Yet he appeared coolly at his office at ten on the following morning. He telephoned Isla, from there, that he was leaving for Philadelphia.

Isla quoted the message to Lady

Laura, and, for once, her mother-in-law gave way to impulse.

"Isla, are you sorry he's going away to-day?"

The girl started. She stared swiftly at Lady Laura, flushed violently, then turned aside to hide the unwelcome scarlet.

"Why, of course I am!" she exclaimed, walking over to a large fern.

Lady Laura was mute. She considered the perils of speech and the pitfalls of silence, not knowing which was the more dangerous. While she pondered anxiously, the flush died out on Isla's cheeks, and feeling her color normal again, she once more faced Lady Laura. But this time the reticence in the girl's eyes was obvious, and her tone had a guarded timbre.

"Why did you ask me that?" she questioned.

"I suppose I was just making conversation," her mother-in-law answered lightly. But Lady Laura felt a sense of bitter exasperation. There certainly was something wrong with these overbeautiful women! They must have tribute—indiscriminate tribute. This girl was not frank any more, and, above all else, Lady Laura valued a clean frankness of speech and gaze. She held it the basis of all the virtues, and had loved Isla because she had seemed to possess it. Now, however, Isla had a secret—or what she stupidly believed to be a secret. It must be Tiernay, because Isla ignored all men except Tiernay and her husband. If the girl had only flirted widely, Lady Laura would have been far less disquieted. But this marked interest à deux could not be a surface affair.

Was Isla so underperceptioned, Lady Laura wondered nervously, as to fancy Jasper a safe man to trifle with? He was not an all-round athlete like Tiernay. Jasper was not spectacular. He was quietly efficient—a far-visioned, successful business man; but under his

intellectual poise lay violent emotional depths, capable of sweeping him into acts of tragic force. Bring Jasper to a certain pitch, bring him to betrayal, and who could answer for the consequences?

But Lady Laura saw that while her daughter-in-law was walled in by her present reticence there could be no hope of helping her, of warning her. Had Lady Laura known what Messrs. Fredrick & Fredrick had discovered, she would, indeed, have acted at once, for she recognized fully that Jasper had in him the potential elements of disaster. She knew that there are perhaps none so dangerous as those who have once been betrayed, because betrayal narrows ordinary people, and Jasper, she felt, was not a great nature, but just an everyday man, the citadel of whose spirit might be driven mad by Isla.

As she did not know what Messrs. Fredrick & Fredrick had reported, she only waited; while her son, already on Staten Island, paced the hidden beauty of the autumn woods and fingered the small automatic in his coat pocket.

After locating the house, by means of the little map Sam Fredrick had given him, he walked until he was tired. Finally he lay down under a copper beech. Above him the loosened October leaves drifted gently down, touching him with soft, regretful friendliness.

The sun glowed toward half past three in the Huguenot Hills when Keswick arose. He had waited in order to give them a little time. He wanted them to be at home, at ease, off guard.

Quietly he started for the cottage. Quietly he put aside the prickly brier vines that tried to thrust him back. Under his feet the dead and dying leaves crackled faintly like vain, whispered warnings. A crow flapped up from the path in front of him. It took a shadowy flight in the direction of the

cottage, as though it had become his ill-omened pilot. But Keswick noticed none of these things. Even the brier vines he put aside unconsciously.

But when he came upon Isla's mare and Tiernay's horse tethered, nose to nose, in a hidden hollow, his face took on even grimmer lines. He passed noiselessly through the great copper beeches surrounding the house. No sound broke the stillness, no dog barked a wise warning to those within as he approached. Only the sad flower faces of frost-touched asters peered at him. At length Keswick came to the vine-veiled piazza.

Only a latched screen door was between him and the living room. He saw the closed door of the inside room, of which Fredrick had spoken. The living room was empty, but on the center table lay Tiernay's gloves and riding crop in full view.

Keswick stood looking at the heavy gray gloves. They seemed to him hatefully warm with the recent intimacy of Tiernay's grasping hands. Bare hands, now, that wanted no gloves between his clasp and—Keswick's finished thought flushed his white face violently. Then the color receded into grim gray as he saw lying between the gloves, almost covered by them, a small, white handkerchief.

He lifted up the sheer, embroidered square. In one corner were the initials "I. K." Slowly he laid the handkerchief down. The evil significance of life, its treacheries, its wanton mockeries, its vain desires for loyalty, its ashen hopes, all circled in the vortex of his mind.

But his pulse was steady. It had the even beat of a deliberate purpose, of a judgment justified. Passionate perplexity and reiterated questions troubled him no longer. Truth, however hideous, was at his elbow. He had nothing left, now, except the final execution of that judgment which

should at least save him from scorn and laughter. Not again should men call him fool.

He waited, listening keenly. Then, in that inside room, he caught Isla's voice.

"Wait half a minute, dear. I'm coming right back," he heard her say.

The door of the inside room opened suddenly. Isla slipped out, closing it cautiously behind her.

Anticipatory as he was of wrecked happiness, he was conscious of an added shock because she was wrapped in a blue-silk kimono, rope girdled. Her crimson mouth was still curved in a tender smile. She had the air of a woman who has indeed come fully into her own—the air she had worn on their honeymoon.

Silently he came forward. The sinister eloquence of his fixed regard struck the color from her face. A white blight of fear fell on her.

"You—you here!" she gasped.

His right hand was in his coat pocket. His fingers were closed about the automatic. But he could not harm Isla. What she was now was protected from annihilation by what she once had been. He did not answer her, except by the eloquence of a look which needed no words. Her terror deepened. She faltered, moving away from the door and leaning against the wall with hands unconsciously spread on it for support.

"Oh, Jasper, why have you tracked me here? And—and—why do you look like that?"

"Why did you rent this house as Mary Smith?"

"Oh, Jasper, does that mean——"

"It means I know everything."

A gray tinge crept into her white face, as though some one had sifted fine ashes over her. One hand felt for her fear-constricted throat, for breathing began to seem difficult.

"Y-you—oh, Jasper—if——" The sentence died away incoherently.

"I know you've got him here. In that room. Now get out! Go into the garden and wait until I've seen this thing through."

"I won't go! You'd hurt him. Your face——" Her voice was harsh and strained.

He laughed; it was a low, hard, ugly sound.

"Hurt him!"

The door opened again. A man came out, whistling softly. He closed the door as cautiously as Isla had done. At first he did not see Isla or Jasper.

It was Tiernay, ruddy, happy-eyed.

Isla's inarticulate moan drew his gaze. His head turned swiftly. He sprang toward her.

"God—Isla, you're ill—frightfully ill!" he exclaimed.

She put out her hands to fend him off.

"Here's—Jasper," she faltered.

Tiernay wheeled.

"You—you here!" he gasped, then he added coarsely: "Oh, the devil! Somebody spilled the beans!"

Isla sank to the floor, overcome by terror. She had not imagined that even the revealing of her secret could have wrought this appalling change in Jasper.

Keswick's hand now closed very steadily around the automatic. His finger was on the trigger. So far as intention went, on Jasper's part, he had already killed. And so far as Tiernay was concerned, there was not a word in the dictionary, nor an appeal in all eloquence, with the power to save him. The invisible skeleton of Death himself stood shoulder to shoulder with Jasper.

Yet, in his stupidity, Tiernay did not catch the forewarning line in the pocket. He did not see, he was fated never to see, the angle of the hidden steel breaking its tailored smoothness.

Then a phantom, coming apparently out of nowhere, as such things must, of course, slipped between Jasper and the man he meant to kill.

It was himself Keswick saw. Himself before the cynical experiences of his mature life had embittered him. The vision infuriated him by its inopportune appearance, even though its seeming reality halted his hand.

Hallucinations are common knowledge, nowadays, and two of his friends had been cursed with them. One had even been visually afflicted with just such a phantom of his boyish self, and was at a sanatorium for treatment. Jasper did not forget that he himself had been living under an almost intolerable tension for some time.

He pulled himself tautly together. He would fire through it. Again his hand closed tensely about the instrument of judgment. Just then the phantom, as tall as himself, but much more youthfully slender, shouted excitedly:

"Say, it's me grown up! It must be dad!"

Dad!

The curt little word cut through the hallucination concept. This tall boy was no phantom; he was real. "Dad!" Jasper jerked his hand from the pocketed death, and stared helplessly. Tiernay moved toward him and laid a kind hand on his shoulder.

"I say, old sport, you want to be decent about all this. I told Isla it was a big mistake to keep the thing a secret. I told her somebody would smell a rat and put you wise in an irritating way."

Irritating! The futile word deepened Jasper Keswick's sense of helplessness. Tiernay's anxious sincerity left him unable to think. He could only listen. The friendly hand on his shoulder tightened.

"Now, I've got to shoot the whole matter at you in a pellet, because I bet you got it wrong some way," Tiernay rushed on, too earnest for embarrassment. "Madelin was drowned, as you heard. The boy—and the man, Leon Tancredo—were not drowned. They

were thrown, half dead, on the shore near a South American village. Tancredo was cracked on the head by a spar, and came to himself with no memory whatever."

It seemed to Keswick that he was listening with all his senses. His soul made no conscious comment on what Tiernay was saying; his mind could not formulate any thought. He was only trying frantically to grasp, to comprehend clearly. Subconsciously, he was aware that the tall boy had lifted Isla, and was supporting her in his arms. Tiernay plunged on determinedly, frowning with effort.

"The boy, only five years old, you know, called himself 'Jasper,' nothing more. He called Tancredo 'Cousin Leon.' Jasper couldn't give the name Keswick. His father's name was just 'father.' Leon Tancredo was named by the villagers 'Leon Perez.' He adopted the boy who called him cousin, made a home, married, and did well. Then disease hit him. Incurable it was. Some one turned up and shocked him into remembering. He found himself dying—and suddenly remembered everything. But now he looked at things differently—I fancy I should say he repented. He came to New York with Jasper. He met your wife secretly; begged her to adopt the boy. Told her the lad, Jasper, knew the whole story, and would be glad to be adopted as an orphan—until his dad got to love him. But Isla saw that couldn't be, because Jasper looks just like you! And she saw Tancredo's days were—well, numbered. So she made a confidant of me. She slipped over here and hired this house as Mary Smith. I cared for the boy and the man; got 'em over here quietly. Isla thought that later, when Tancredo was—er—gone, she could soften you and——"

Reasoning intelligence was blending normally now with Keswick's strained listening.

"Tancredo——" He cried hoarsely.

"He's in that inside room there. He won't live till morning, old chap," Tiernay said, and continued naïvely: "Really, old top, I'm damned glad it's all out! For sneaking around with Isla so much—and she so pretty a fellow wants to kiss her—got on my nerves, for fear you'd think I was flirtin' with her. Though, of course," he added hastily, apologetically, "I know you didn't think anything rotten like that."

"God!" muttered Keswick thickly. It had suddenly become difficult to breathe, and his knees were weakening under him. He seemed to see, not Tiernay alive, but Tiernay stretched, bleeding and dead, before him, while across his body lay the boy—the boy he had started to fire through—the once-living shield as dead as his once-uncomprehended friend.

He could not bear the vision. To hide it, he dropped into a chair, burying his twitching face in his arms, clutched together on the table before him.

There was silence in the room. Tiernay stood near him, inwardly cursing his own clumsiness. He felt that his words had been crass and stupid. Things like that needed time.

He moved closer, and again his hand anxiously sought Keswick's shoulder.

"I say, old chap, I—I've botched this——"

Isla, suddenly strong, now that her secret was wholly revealed, reached up and kissed the boy's forehead. She hurried over to Jasper, leading the boy by the hand. For a moment she gazed down at the bent head tenderly; then she knelt beside him, and her soft hand stole up to Keswick's coat lapel.

"Oh, Jasper—take the boy! Your dear, untarnished, clean-hearted son! Share him with me! We did the best

we knew how for you. Oh, won't you forgive us?"

Silence again. Then Keswick's chest was racked with dry, gasping sobs of distress. Should he ever forget what might have been? When at length he had conquered his emotion, Jasper rose with a white but composed face. He swept his son and wife into an embrace which needed no interpretation. Then he turned to Tiernay, and caught his hand in a convulsive, crushing grasp.

"Tiernay, if I could only—but I can't!" he said thickly. Then a saving flash of humor broke through his distress. "But about that flirting idea—kiss him for me, Isla!"

An impish, audacious look of joy flashed upon his wife's face; out of threatened wreckage happiness had emerged. She gave her scrawny young stepson a delighted little hug, as she retorted:

"Kiss Maurice yourself! I won't. He's engaged to the nicest girl in New York—it happened only yesterday. She knows the secret, too, 'cause I couldn't have her thinking me a silly vamp, but she might pull my hair if I saluted him!"

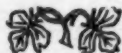
As she finished speaking, the door of the inside room opened once more. The battle-ax figure of Hodges stalked out. She closed the door gently behind her.

"He's gone—quicklike, he went, and peaceful," she said a trifle loudly in her metallic voice. "Would any of you want to see him?"

The boy uttered an anguished little cry; it spoke much for the good which had been in the dead man.

Keswick flung an arm round him.

"You and I are going home together now, son," he said firmly. "Isla—your mother—and Maurice will stay behind and see that everything is done for—him in the best way. Come!"



The Moon Out of Reach

By Margaret Pedler

Author of "The Lamp of Fate," etc.



THE STORY SO FAR

Penelope Craig was always conscious of a sense of foreboding when she thought of Nan Davenant with whom she lived in London and whose brilliant future as a pianist was of more absorbing interest to her than her own career as a singer—for Nan was a gifted musician. She was afraid, too, of the effect of a recent unfortunate love affair on a girl of Nan's temperament. Maryon Rooke, a rising young artist, had won Nan's love, but while he cared for her, he frankly admitted that art came first with him—and love a poor second. So he left London to go abroad and Nan felt that her moon was, indeed, out of reach. Several weeks after his departure Nan started to Exeter alone to play at a charity concert. On the way to the station her taxicab broke down and, in her anxiety not to miss the train, Nan hailed another cab whose solitary passenger was a man. During the drive to the station she learned that her good Samaritan was Peter Mallory. Mallory left Nan after securing a seat for her, but because of an accident her train reached St. David's station an hour late and Nan missed her connection for Abbencombe. She was wondering helplessly what to do when Peter Mallory again appeared. He had traveled on the same train, in the smoker, and was bound for Abbencombe also. He hired a car and drove Nan to her destination. Back in London, later in the week, Nan met Mallory at the Seymours' dinner party. From Kitty Seymour she learned that Peter had written the most-talked-of book of the year—and that he was married to a woman who had almost wrecked his life, they had separated and his wife was living in India. Nan was conscious of a curious sense of loss at the discovery of Peter's marriage. And everything seemed to chant at her tantalizingly: "Peter's married! Peter's married!"

CHAPTER V.

IN due course Mallory paid his call upon the occupants of the flat, and entertained both girls immensely by the utter lack of self-consciousness with which he assisted in the preparations for tea—toasting scones and coaxing the kettle to boil as naturally as they themselves would have done. He had none of the average Englishman's *mauvaise honte*.

This first visit was soon followed by others, and then by a foursome dinner at the Carlton, Ralph Fenton being invited to complete the party. Before long, Peter was on a pleasant footing of intimacy with the two girls at

the flat, though beyond this he did not seek to progress.

The explanation was simple enough. Primarily, he was always aware of the cord which shackled him to a restless, butterfly woman who played at life out in India, and secondly, although he was undoubtedly attracted by Nan, he was not the type of man to fall headlong in love. He was too fastidious, too critical, altogether too much master of himself. Few women caused him a single quickened heartbeat. But it is to such men as this that, when at last love grips them, it comes as an irresistible force to be reckoned with throughout the remainder of their lives.

So it came about that, as the weeks grew into months, Mallory perceived dimly and with a quaint resignation to the inevitable that Nan and Love were coming to him hand in hand.

His first thought had been to seek safety in flight; then that gently humorous philosophy with which he habitually looked life in the face asserted itself, and with a shrug and a muttered "Kismet," he remained.

Outwardly, all that Peter permitted himself was to give her an unfailing friendship, to surround her with an atmosphere of homage and protection and adapt himself responsively to her varying moods. This he did untiringly, demanding nothing in return, and he alone knew the bitter effort it cost him.

Gradually Nan began to lean upon him, finding, in the restfulness of such a friendship, the healing of which she was in need. She worked at her music with suddenly renewed enthusiasm, secure in the knowledge that Peter was always at hand to help and criticize with kindly, unerring judgment. She ceased to rail at fate and almost learned to bring a little philosophy, the happy philosophy of laughter, to bear upon the ills of life.

Consciously she thought of him only as Peter—Peter, her good pal—and so long as the pleasant, even course of their friendship remained uninterrupted, she was never likely to realize that something bigger and more enduring than mere comradeship lay at the back of it. She, too, like Mallory, reassured herself with the fact of his marriage, though the wife she had never seen and of whom Peter never spoke had inevitably receded in her mind into a somewhat vague and nebulous personality.

July in London, hot, dusty, and oppressive. Even the breezy altitude of the top-floor apartment could not save its occupants from the intense heat which seemed to be wafted up from the

baking streets below. The flat was "at home" to-day, the festive occasion indicated by the quantities of flowers which adorned it.

Penelope trailed somewhat lethargically hither and thither, adding last touches to the small, green tables arranged in readiness for bridge, and sighing at the oppressive heat of the afternoon. First she opened the windows to let in the air, then closed them to shut out the heat, only to fling them open once again, exclaiming impatiently:

"Phew! I really don't know which is the cooler!"

"Neither!" responded a gay voice from the doorway. "The bottomless pit would probably be refreshingly drafty in comparison with town just now."

Penelope whirled round to find Kitty, looking perfectly cool and composed, standing on the threshold.

"How do you manage it?" she said admiringly. "Even in this sweltering heat, when the rest of us look as though we had run in the wash, you give the impression of having just stepped out of a refrigerated bandbox."

"Appearances are as deceitful as usual, then," replied Kitty, sinking down into an armchair and unfurling a small fan. "I'm simply melted! Am I the first arrival?" she continued. "Where's Nan?"

"She and Peter are decorating the tea table, smilax and things, you know." Penelope waved an explanatory hand.

"I think my plan was a good one, don't you? Peter's been an excellent antidote to Maryon Rooke," Kitty observed complacently.

"I'm not so sure," returned Penelope, with characteristic caution. "I think a married man, especially an *un*-married married man like Peter, is rather a dangerous antidote."

"Nonsense! They both know he's married! And they've both got normal common sense."

"But," objected Penelope, suddenly and unexpectedly, "love has nothing whatever to do with common sense."

Kitty gazed at her in frank amazement.

"Penelope! What's come over you? We've always regarded you as the severely practical member of the community and here you are talking rank heresy!"

Penelope laughed a little, and a faint flush stole up into her cheeks.

"I'm not unobservant, remember," she returned lightly, her eyes avoiding Kitty's. "And my observations have led me to the conclusion that love and common sense are distinctly antipathetic."

"But you don't think she really cares for him, do you?" Kitty asked sharply.

The other reflected a moment before replying. Finally she said:

"If she does, it is quite unconsciously. Consciously, I feel almost sure that Maryon Rooke still occupies her thoughts."

"I wonder where she finds the great attraction in him?" queried Kitty thoughtfully.

"Simply this: That he was the first and, so far, the only man who has ever appealed to her at all. And as he has treated her rather badly, he's succeeded in fixing himself in her mind."

"Well, I've never understood the affair at all. Rooke was in love, if ever a man was."

"Yes," agreed Penelope slowly. "But I think Maryon Rooke is what I should describe as—a born bachelor. And I believe that Nan has such a tremendous fascination for him that he simply can't resist her. In fact, I think if the question of finance didn't enter into the matter, he'd be ready to shoulder the matrimonial yoke. But I don't see Maryon Rooke settling down to matrimony on a limited income! And, of course, Nan's own income ceases if she marries."

"But Rooke will be making big money before very long," protested Kitty. "He'll be able to settle a decent income on his wife in a few years."

"Very possibly. He'll be one of the most fashionable portrait painters of the day. But until that day comes, Maryon isn't going to tie himself up with a woman whose income ceases when she marries. Besides, an untached bachelor is considerably more in demand as a painter of society women's portraits than a benedict," she concluded.

"So Nan is to be sacrificed?" threw out Kitty.

"It seems like it. And as long as Maryon Rooke occupies the foreground in her mind, no other man will be to her anything but a friend."

"Then I wish somebody, or something, would sweep him out of her mind!"

"Well, he's away now, at any rate," said Penelope soothingly. "So let's be thankful for small mercies."

As she spoke, the maid, an improvement on their original "Adagio," entered with a telegram on a salver which she offered to Penelope. The latter slit open the envelope without glancing at the address and uttered a sharp exclamation of dismay as she read the brief communication it contained.

"What is it, Penny?" Kitty asked quickly. "Not bad news?"

"It's for Nan," returned Penelope shortly. "You can read it."

Kitty perused it in silence.

Am in town. Shall call this afternoon on chance of finding you in. ROOKE.

"The very last person we wanted to blow in here just now," commented Kitty, as she returned the wire.

Penelope slipped it back into its envelope and replaced it on the salver.

"Take it to Miss Davenant," she told the maid quietly. "And explain that you brought it to me by mistake."

CHAPTER VI.

Meanwhile, in the next room, Peter and Nan, having completed their scheme of decoration with "smilax and things," were resting from their labors and smoking sociably together.

Nan cast a reflective eye upon the table.

"You don't think it looks too much like shrubbery where you have to hunt for the cakes, do you?" she suggested.

"Certainly I don't," replied Peter promptly. "If there is some light confusion occasioned by that trail of smilax round the pink, sugar-icing cake, it merely adds to its attractiveness. The charm of mystery, you know!"

"I believe if Maryon were here he would sweep it all on to the floor in disgust!" observed Nan suddenly. "He'd say we'd forfeited simplicity."

"Maryon Rooke, the artist, you mean?"

The warm color rushed into Nan's face and she glanced at Peter with startled, almost frightened, eyes. She could not conceive why the sudden recollection of Rooke should have sprung into her mind at this particular moment.

"Yes," she answered with difficulty.

Peter bent forward.

"Nan"—Peter spoke very quietly—"Nan, was he the man?"

She nodded voicelessly. Peter made a quick gesture as though to lay his hand over hers, then checked it abruptly.

"My dear," he said, "do you still care?"

"No, I don't think so," she answered uncertainly. "I—I'm not sure. Oh, Peter, how difficult life is!"

He assented briefly. He knew very well how difficult.

"I can't imagine why I thought of Maryon just now," went on Nan, a puzzled frown wrinkling her brows. "I never do, as a rule, when I'm with you."

She smiled rather wistfully and, with

a restless movement, he sprang to his feet and began pacing the room. A little cry of dismay broke from her and she came quickly to his side, lifting a questioning face to his.

"Why, Peter—Peter! What have I said? You're not angry, are you?"

"Angry!" His voice roughened a bit. "If I could only tell you the truth!"

"Tell me," she said simply.

"Don't ask me, Nan," he said, after a moment of silence. "There are some things that can't be told."

As he spoke his eyes, dark and passionate with restrained emotion, met hers, and in an instant it seemed as though the thing he must not speak were spoken.

Nan flushed scarlet from brow to throat, her eyes widened, and the breath fluttered unevenly between her parted lips. She knew—she knew what he had left unsaid.

"Peter!"

She held out her hands to him, with a sudden, childish gesture of surrender, and involuntarily he gathered them into his own. At the same moment the door opened to admit the maid and he drew back quickly.

"This wire's just come for you, miss," said the maid. "I took it to Miss Craig by mistake."

Mechanically Nan extracted the thin sheet from its torn envelope and, as she read the few lines, her face whitened and she caught her breath sharply.

The next instant, however, she recovered her poise and, crumpling the telegram into a ball, she addressed the maid composedly.

"There's no answer," she said, adding: "Has any one arrived yet?"

"Mrs. Seymour is here, miss. And I think Lord St. John may just have arrived."

Nan turned to Mallory.

"Then we'd better go, Peter. Come along."

Mallory, as he followed her into the

sitting room, realized that she had all at once retreated a thousand miles away from him. He wondered what the contents of the telegram could have been. The oblong red envelope seemed to have descended suddenly between them like a shutter.

During the next half hour the remainder of the guests came dropping in by twos and threes, and after a little desultory conversation, every one settled down to the serious business of bridge.

Nan, as a rule, played a good game, but to-day her playing was nervous and erratic, and Mallory, her partner of the moment, instinctively connected this with the agitation she had shown on receiving the wire. Ignorant of its contents, he awaited developments.

He had not very long to wait. Shortly afterward the trill of the doorbell pealed through the flat and, a minute later, Maryon Rooke came into the room. A brief stir followed his entrance, as Penelope and one or two other nonplayers exchanged greetings with him. Then he crossed over to Nan. She was acutely conscious of his tall, loose-limbed figure as he threaded his way carefully between the tables.

After a few words of greeting, Rooke moved away from their table, but Nan's playing grew wilder and more erratic with each hand that was dealt, though she made an effort to focus her attention on the cards, until at last a good no-trump call, completely thrown away by her disastrous tactics, brought the rubber to an end.

"You're not in your usual form this afternoon, Nan," remarked one of her opponents as they all rose from the table. Other tables, too, were breaking up and some of the guests were preparing to leave.

"No. I've played abominably," she acquiesced. "I apologize, partner," she continued, turning to Peter. "It must

be the weather. This heat's intolerable."

He put her apologies aside with a quick gesture.

"There's thunder in the air, I think. You shouldn't have troubled to play, if you didn't feel inclined."

Nan threw him a glance of gratitude; Peter never seemed to fail her, either in big or little things. Then she moved away to join the chattering knot of departing guests congregated round the doorway.

Mallory's eyes followed her thoughtfully. He had already surmised that Maryon Rooke was the sender of the telegram, and he could see how unmistakably the man's sudden reappearance had shaken her. He felt baffled. Did the man still hold her? Was all the striving of the last few months to prove useless?

He was roused from his thoughts to the realization that people were leaving. Every one appeared to be talking at once and the air was full of the murmur of winnings and losses. Maryon Rooke alone showed no signs of moving, but remained standing, a little apart, near the window.

"Penelope, do come back to Green Street with me." Kitty's voice was beseeching. "My little milliner was to have had a couple of hats ready for me this afternoon, which means she will arrive with a perfect avalanche of boxes, each containing a dinkier hat than the last, and I shall fall a helpless victim."

"Yes, do come along, Penny," her husband urged. "Then you can lay a restraining hand on Kitty when she's bought the first half dozen."

"There'll just be time before dinner, and the car shall bring you back again," entreated Kitty, and Penelope, knowing that the former would be but clay in the practiced hands of her "little milliner," smiled acquiescence.

"Barry"—Kitty tapped her husband's

arm—"go down and see if the car is there. Peter, can I drop you anywhere?"

In a couple of minutes the room was cleared, and Kitty, shepherding her flock before her, departed in a gale of good-bys, leaving Nan and Maryon Rooke together.

Each was silent. The girl's small head was thrown back, and in the poise of her slim young body there was a mingling of challenge and appealing self-defense. She looked like some trapped wild thing at bay.

Slowly Rooke crossed the room and came toward her, and as she met those odd, magnetic eyes of his, she felt the old fascination stealing over her once more. Her heart sank. She had dreaded this, fought against it, and in her inmost soul believed that she had conquered it. Yet now his mere presence sent the blood racing through her veins with a hurrying, leaping speed that frightened her.

"Nan!" As he spoke, he bent and took her two hands gently into his. Then, as though the touch of her slight fingers roused some slumbering fire within him, his grasp tightened suddenly. He drew her nearer, his eyes holding hers, and her slim body swayed toward him, yielding to the eager clasp of his arms.

"Kiss me, Nan!" he said, the roughness of passion in his voice. "You never kissed me—never in all those beautiful months we were together. And now—now when there's only parting ahead of us—"

She could hear his hurried breathing. His lips were almost touching hers— Then the door opened quickly and Peter Mallory stood upon the threshold.

Swiftly though they started apart, it was impossible that he should not have seen Rooke holding Nan close in his arms, his head bent above hers. Their

attitude was unmistakable; it could have but one significance.

Mallory paused abruptly in the doorway. Then, in a voice entirely devoid of expression, he said quietly:

"Mrs. Seymour left her fan behind. I came back to fetch it." With a slight bow he picked up the forgotten fan and turned to go. "Good-by once more."

The door closed behind him and Nan stood very still. But Maryon could read the stricken expression in her eyes, the desperate appeal of them. They betrayed her.

"What's that man to you?" he demanded.

"Nothing."

Rooke caught her roughly by the shoulders.

"I don't believe it!" he exclaimed hotly. "He's the man you love. The very expression of your face gave it away."

"I've told you," she answered unemotionally. "Peter Mallory is nothing to me, never can be anything to me, except"—her voice quivered a little despite herself—"just a friend."

Maryon's eyes searched her face.

"Then kiss me!" He repeated his earlier demand imperiously.

She drew back.

"Why should I kiss you?"

The quietly uttered question seemed to set him very far away from her. In an instant he knew how much he had forfeited by his absence.

"Nan," he said, in his voice a curious charm of appeal. "Do you know it's nearly a year since I saw you? And now—now I've only half an hour!"

"Only half an hour?" she repeated vaguely.

"Yes, I go back to Devonshire tomorrow. But I craved a glimpse of the 'Beloved' before I went."

The words brought Nan sharply back to herself. He was still the same incomprehensible, unsatisfactory lover as of old, and with the realization a cold

fury of scorn and resentment swept over her, blotting out what she had always counted as her love for him. It was as though a string, too tightly stretched, had suddenly snapped.

"To cheer you on your way, I suppose?" she said indifferently.

"No. I shouldn't call it cheering. I've been back in England a month, alone in the damned desolation of Dartmoor, fighting—fighting to keep away from you."

She looked at him with steady, scrutinizing eyes.

"Why need you have kept away?" she asked incisively.

"At the bidding of the great god Circumstance. Oh, my dear, my dear!" He spoke with passionate vehemence. "Don't you know, don't you understand that if only I weren't a poor devil of a painter, with my way to make in a world that can only be bought with gold—nothing should part us, ever again? But as it is—"

He broke off with a gesture of renunciation.

Nan listened to the outburst with bent head. She understood now, oh, yes, she understood perfectly. He loved her well enough in his own way, but Maryon's way meant that the love and happiness of the woman who married him would always be a matter of secondary importance. The bitterness of her resentment deepened within her, flooding her whole being.

"If only!" repeated Rooke. "It's the old story, Nan, the desire of the moth for the flame."

"The moth is a very blundering creature," said Nan very quietly. "He makes mistakes sometimes, perhaps imagining a flame where there is none."

"No!" exclaimed Rooke violently. "I make no mistake! You loved me as much as I loved you. I know it! By God, do you think a man can't tell when the woman he loves loves him?"

"Well, you must accept the only al-

ternative, then," she answered coolly. "Sometimes a flame flickers out—and dies."

The coldness of her tone whipped him to greater passion. In a sudden madness he caught her in his arms, crushing her slender body against his, and kissed her savagely.

"There!" he cried, a note of fierce triumph ringing in his voice. "Whether your love is dead or not, I won't go out of your life with nothing—Your lips are mine—mine!" Then he stumbled from the room.

Nan remained just where he had left her. She stood quite motionless for several minutes, almost as though she were waiting for something. Then, with a leap of her breath, half sigh, half exultation, the knowledge of what had happened to her crystallized into clear significance.

In one swift, overwhelming moment of illumination she realized that Maryon Rooke no longer meant anything to her. She felt completely indifferent as to whether she ever saw him again or not. She was free! While he had been with her she had felt uncertain of herself. The interview had shaken her. But now that he had gone, it came upon her with a shock of joyful surprise that she was free—beautifully, gloriously free!

The ecstasy lasted only for a moment. Then with a sudden, childish movement she put her hand resentfully to her face where the roughness of his beard had grazed it. She wished he had not kissed her—it would be a disagreeable memory.

"I shall never forget now," she muttered. "I shall never be able to forget."

There was an odd note of fear in her voice.

CHAPTER VII.

Having secured Kitty's forgotten fan, Mallory absent-mindedly descended the long stone flight of steps instead of

taking the lift, and regaining the street, hailed a passing taxi and drove toward Green Street, whither the Seymours' car had already proceeded.

As the driver threaded his way through the traffic, Peter's thoughts revolved round the scene which his unexpected return to the flat had interrupted. There was only one deduction to be drawn from it, which was that Nan, after all, still cared for Maryon Rooke. The old love still held her.

The realization was bitter. Even though the woman who was his wife must always stand between himself and Nan, yet, loving her as he did, it had meant a good deal to Mallory to know that no other man had any claim upon her.

And earlier in the afternoon, just before the maid had intruded on them to deliver Rooke's telegram, it had seemed almost as if Nan, too, had cared.

A vague vision of the future had flashed through his mind—he and Nan never any more to one another than good comrades, but each knowing that underneath their friendship lay something stronger and deeper; the knowledge that, though unavowed, they belonged to each other. And even a love that can never be satisfied is better than life without love.

But now the whole situation was altered. Unmistakably, Maryon Rooke still meant a good deal to Nan, although Peter felt a certain consciousness that if he were to pit himself against Rooke he could probably make the latter's position very insecure. But was it fair?

She was not a woman to find happiness easily, and he himself had nothing to offer her except a love which must always be forbidden, unconsummated. In God's name, then, if Maryon Rooke could give her happiness, what right had he to stand in the way?

By the time the taxi had brought him to the door of Kitty's house, his decision was made. He would clear out—

see as little of Nan as possible. It was the best thing he could do for her, and the consideration of what it would cost him, he relegated to a later period.

His steps lagged somewhat as he followed the manservant upstairs to Kitty's own particular den, and the slight limp which the war had left him seemed rather more marked than usual. Any great physical or nervous strain invariably produced this effect. But he mustered up a smile as he entered the room and held out the recovered fan.

The "little milliner" was nowhere to be seen, and Kitty herself was ensconced on the Chesterfield, enjoying an iced lemon squash, while Penelope and Barry were downstairs playing a desultory game of billiards. The irregular click of the ivory balls came faintly to Mallory's ears.

"Got my fan, Peter? Heaps of thanks. What will you have? A whisky and soda? Why, Peter!"

She stopped abruptly as she caught sight of his face. He was rather pale and his eyes had a tired, beaten look in them.

"What's wrong, Peter?"

He smiled down at her as she lay tucked up among the cushions.

"Why should there be anything wrong?"

"Something is," replied Kitty decidedly. "Did I swish you away from the flat against your will?"

"I should be a very ungrateful person if I failed to appreciate my present privileges."

Kitty shook her head disgustedly.

"You're a very annoying person!" she returned. "You invariably take refuge in a compliment."

"Dear Madame Kitty"—Mallory leaned forward and looked down at her with his steady, gray-blue eyes—"dear Madame Kitty, I say to you what I mean. I do not compliment my friends," his voice deepened, "my dear, trusted friends."

"But that's just it!" she declared emphatically. "You're not trusting me! You're keeping me outside the door."

"Believe me, there's nothing you'd wish to see on the other side."

"Which means that, in any case, it's no use knocking at a door that won't be opened," said Kitty, apparently yielding the point. "So we'll switch off that subject and get on to the next. We go down to Mallow Court at the end of the week. I can't stand town in July. What date are you coming to us?"

Peter was silent a moment. Then he said quietly:

"I'm afraid I shan't be able to come down this year."

"But you promised us!" objected Kitty. "Peter, you can't go back on a promise!"

"Sometimes one has to do—even that," he said gravely.

Kitty, discerning in his refusal another facet of that "something wrong" she had suspected, clasped her hands round her knees and faced him with deliberation.

"Look here, Peter, it isn't like you to break a promise without some very good reason. You say you can't come down to us at Mallow. Why not?"

Peter met her eyes steadily.

"I can't answer that," he replied.

Kitty remained obdurate.

"I want an answer, Peter. We've been pals for a good many years, and I'm not going to be kept out of whatever it is that's hurting you now."

He made no answer, and she slipped down from the Chesterfield and came to his side.

"Has it anything to do with Nan?" she asked gently, her thoughts going back to the talk she had had with Penelope before the bridge party began.

A rather weary smile curved his lips.

"It doesn't seem much use trying to keep you in the dark, does it?"

"I must know," she urged. Adding

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with feminine guile: "Of course, I should be frightfully hurt if I thought you weren't coming just because you didn't want to. But still I'd rather know—even if that were the reason."

"Not want to?" he broke out, his control suddenly snapping. "I'd give my soul to come!"

The bitterness in his voice, in the lazy, drawling tones she knew so well, let in a flood of light upon the darkness in which she had been groping.

"Peter—oh, Peter!" she cried tremulously. "You're not—you don't mean that you care for Nan, seriously?"

"I don't think many men could be with her much without caring," he answered simply.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I—I never thought of that when I asked you to be a pal to her." Her voice shook uncontrollably.

"You needn't be sorry," he said, speaking with great gentleness. "I shall never be sorry that I love her. It's only that, just now, she doesn't need me. That's why I won't come down to Mallow."

"Doesn't need you?"

"No. The man she needs has come back. I can't tell you how I know, you'll have to trust me about that, but I do know that Maryon Rooke has come back to her and that he is the man who means everything to her."

"I don't think you're right," Kitty said, in tones of conviction. "I don't believe she 'needs' him at all. I dare say he still fascinates her. He has"—she hesitated—"a sort of damnable fascination for some women. And the sooner Nan is cured of it the better."

"I've done—all that I could," he answered briefly.

"Don't I know that? You've been splendid! That's just why I want you to come down to us in Cornwall."

"But if Rooke is there——"

"Maryon?" She paused, then went on with a chilly little note of haughti-

ness in her voice. "I certainly don't propose to invite Maryon Rooke to Mallow."

"Still, you can't prevent him from taking a summer holiday at St. Wennys."

St. Wennys was a small fishing village on the Cornish coast, barely a mile away from Mallow Court.

"He won't come, I'm sure!" asserted Kitty. "Sir Robert Burnham lives quite near there—he's Maryon's godfather—and they hate each other like poison."

"Why?"

"Oh, old Sir Robert was Maryon's guardian till he came of age, and then, when Maryon decided to go in for painting, he presented him with the small patrimony to which he was entitled and declined to have anything further to do with him—either financially or otherwise. Simply chucked him. Maryon went through some very bad times, I believe, in his early days," continued Kitty, striving to be just. "That's the one thing I respect him for. He stuck to it and won through to where he stands now."

"It shows he's got some grit, anyway," agreed Peter. "And do you think that that's the type of man who's going to give in over winning the woman he wants? Should I, if things were different, if I were free?"

Kitty laughed reluctantly.

"You? No. But you're not Maryon Rooke. He could never be the kind of lover you would be, my Peter. With him, art comes before anything else in the wide world. And that's why I don't think he'll come to St. Wennys. He's in love with Nan, as far as his type can be in love, but he's not going to tie himself up with her. So he'll keep away. Peter, dear, if Rooke doesn't show up there, will you come to Mallow?"

Peter still hesitated. And all at once Kitty saw the other side of the picture—Peter's side, and when she spoke

again it was in a very subdued tone of voice and with an accent of keen self-reproach.

"Peter, I'm a selfish pig! All this time I've never been thinking of you, only of ourselves. I believe it's your own fault," she scolded, with a rather quavering little laugh; "you've taught us all to expect so much from you and to give so little."

Mallory made a quick gesture of dissent.

"Oh, yes, you have," she insisted. "You're always giving and we just take! I never thought how hard a thing I was asking when I begged you to come down to Mallow while Nan was with us. Please forgive me, Peter!" Her voice trembled a little.

"My dear, there's nothing to forgive. You know I love Nan, that she'll always be the one woman for me. But you know, too, that there's Celia, and that Nan and I can never be more to each other than we are now, just friends. I'm not going to forfeit that friendship unless I think it would be best for Nan that we should forget we were even friends. And I won't say it doesn't hurt to be with her. But there are some hurts that one would rather bear than lose what goes with them."

The grave voice, with the undertone of pain running through it, ceased. Kitty's tears were flowing unchecked.

"Oh, Peter, Peter!" she cried brokenly. "Why aren't you free? You and Nan are just made for each other."

He winced a little as though she had laid her finger on a raw spot.

"Hush, Kitten," he said quietly. "Don't cry so! These things happen and we've got to face them."

Kitty subsided into a chair and mopped her eyes.

"It's wicked—wicked that you should be tied up to a woman like Celia—a woman who's got no more soul than this chair!" She banged the arm of her chair viciously.

"And you mustn't say things like that, either," chided Peter.

As he spoke there came the sound of footsteps and the voices of Barry and Penelope could be heard as they approached Kitty's den by way of the corridor. Kitty sprang up, suddenly conscious of her tear-stained face.

"Oh, I can't see them, not now! Peter, stop them from coming here!"

A moment later Mallory came out of the room and met the approaching couple before they had reached the door.

"I was just coming to say good-by to Kitty," began Penelope. "I'd no idea the time had flown so quickly."

"Charm of my society," murmured Barry.

Peter's face was rather white and set, but he managed to reply in a voice that sounded fairly normal.

"Kitty's very fagged and she's going to rest for a few minutes before dressing for dinner. She asked me to say good-by to you for her, Penelope."

"Then it falls to my lot to speed the parting guest," said Barry cheerily. "Peter, old son, can the car take you on anywhere after dropping Penny at the Mansions?"

Peter was conscious of a sudden panic. He felt that, at the moment, he could not endure the companionship of any living soul.

"No, thanks," he answered jerkily. "I'll walk."

CHAPTER VIII.

Mallow Court, the Seymours' country home, lay not a mile from the village of St. Wemmys. A low, two-storied house of creeper-clad stone, it stood perched upon the cliffs, overlooking the wild sea which beats up against the Cornish coast.

The house itself had been built in a quaint, three-sided fashion, the central portion and the two wings, which flanked it rectangularly, serving to in-

close a sunken lawn round which ran a wide, flagged path. A low, gray stone wall, facing the sea, fenced the fourth side of the square, at one end of which a gate gave egress on to the sea-bitten grassy slope that led to the edge of the cliff itself.

"I can't understand why you spend so much time in stuffy old London, Kitty, when you have this heavenly place to come to."

Nan spoke from a nest of half a dozen cushions heaped together beneath the shade of a tree. Here she was lounging luxuriously while Kitty swung tranquilly in a hammock close by. Penelope had been invisible since lunch time. They had all been down at Mallow the better part of a month and she and Ralph Fenton quite frequently absented themselves. "Hovering," as Barry explained, "on the verge of an engagement."

"My dear, the longer I stay in town, the more thoroughly I enjoy the country when we come here. I get the quintessence of enjoyment by treating Mallow as a liqueur."

Nan laughed, but there was a faint flavor of bitterness in her laughter.

"Practically most of our good times in this world are only to be obtained in the liqueur form. The gods don't make a habit of offering you a big jug of enjoyment."

"If they did, you'd be certain to refuse it because you didn't like the shape of the jug!" retorted Kitty.

"What a miserable, carping, discontented creature I must be!"

"I'll swear that's not true!" An emphatic masculine voice intervened, and round the corner of the clump of trees beneath which the two girls had taken refuge swung a man's tall, well-set-up figure, clad in knickerbockers and a Norfolk coat.

"Good gracious, Roger, how you made me jump!" Kitty hurriedly lowered a pair of smartly shod feet which

had been occupying a somewhat elevated position in the hammock.

"I'm sorry. How d'you do, Kit? And how are you, Miss Davenant?" asked the newcomer.

His piercing eyes beneath shaggy, sunburned brows—fierce, far-visioned eyes that reminded one of the eyes of a hawk—softened amazingly as they rested upon Nan's charming face.

"Oh, we're quite all right, thanks," she answered. "That is, when people don't drop suddenly from the clouds and galvanize us into action this warm weather."

She regarded him with a faintly quizical smile. He was not particularly attractive in appearance, though tall and well built. About forty-two, a typical English sportsman of the outdoor cold-tub-in-the-morning genus, he had a square-jawed, rather ugly face, roofed with a crop of brown hair a trifle sunburned at its tips. His mouth indicated a certain amount of self-will, the inborn imperiousness of a man whose forbears, from one generation to another, have always been masters of men. And, it might be added, masters of their womankind as well, in the good, old-fashioned way. There was, too, more than a hint of obstinacy and temper in the long, rather projecting chin and dominant nose.

But the smile which he bestowed on Nan when he answered her redeemed the ugliness of his face considerably. It was the smile of a man who could be both kindly and generous where his prejudices were not involved, who might even be capable of something rather big, if the occasion warranted it.

"It was too bad of me to startle you like that," he acknowledged. "Please forgive me." Then he added hastily: "I've been exercising hounds to-day."

Trenby was master of the Trevithick foxhounds and had the reputation of being one of the finest huntsmen in the county.

"Oh," cried Nan warmly, "why didn't you bring them round by Mal-low before you went back to the kennels?"

"We didn't come coastward at all," he replied. "I never thought of your caring to see them."

Nan was not in the least a sports-woman by nature, though she had hunted as a child, albeit much against her will, to satisfy the whim of a father who had been a dare-devil rider across country and had found his joy in life—and finally his death—in the hunting field he had loved. But she was a lover of animals, like most people of artistic temperament, and her reply was enthusiastic.

"Of course I'd like to have seen them!"

"Then will you let me show you the kennels one day?" Roger asked eagerly. "I could motor over for you and bring you back afterward."

"I'd like to come very much. When shall we do it?"

Kitty stirred idly in her hammock.

"You've let yourself in for it now, Roger," she remarked. "Nan is the most impatient person alive."

"Don't be alarmed by what Kitty tells you, Mr. Trenby." Nan smiled gently as she spoke, and Roger delightedly watched the adorable way her lips curled up at the corners and the faint dimple which came and went. "She considers it a duty to pick holes in poor me, good for my morals, you know."

"It must be a somewhat difficult occupation," he returned, bowing awkwardly.

Into Nan's mind flashed the recollection of a supple, expressive, un-English bow, and of a deftness of phrase compared with which Trenby's labored compliment savored of the elephantine. Swiftly she dismissed the memory, irritably chasing it from her mind, for was it not five long, black, incomprehensible weeks since Peter had vanished from

her ken? From the day of the bridge party at the Edenhall flat she had neither seen nor heard from him, and during those five silent weeks she had come to recognize the fact that Peter meant much more to her than just a friend.

"Well, then, what about Thursday next for going over to the kennels? Are you disengaged?"

Trenby's voice broke suddenly across her reverie. She threw him a brilliant smile.

"Yes, Thursday would do very well."

"Agreed, then. I'll call for you at half past ten," said Trenby. "Well, I must be moving on now. I have to go over one of my farms before dinner, so I'll say good-by."

He lifted his cap and strode away. Nan watched his broad-shouldered, well-knit figure with reflective eyes, the while irrepressible little gurgles and explosions of mirth emanated from the hammock.

"What on earth are you giggling about, Kitty?" Nan burst out irritably.

"At the lion endeavoring to lie down with the lamb," submitted Kitty meekly.

"Don't talk in parables."

"It's a very easy one to interpret." Kitty succumbed once more to a gale of laughter. "It was just too delicious to watch you and Roger together! You'd much better leave him alone, my dear, and play with the dolls you're used to."

"How detestable you are, Kitty! I promise you one thing, it's going to be much worse for the lion than for the lamb."

Mrs. Barry Seymour sat up suddenly, the laughter dying out of her eyes.

"Nan," she admonished, "you leave Roger alone. He's as nature made him and not fair game for such as you. Leave him to some simple country maiden. Edna Langdon, for instance."

"Surely I can outgeneral her?" Nan retorted impertinently.

"Outgeneral her? Of course you can. But that's just what you mustn't do. I won't allow you to play with Roger. He's too good a sort, even if he is a bit heavy in hand."

"I agree. He's quite a good sort. But he needs educating. Anyway, perhaps I'm not going to 'play' with him."

"Not? Then what— Nan, you never mean to suggest that you're in earnest?"

"And why not, pray?"

"Seriously, Nan, you and Roger Trenby are about as unsuited to each other as any man and woman could possibly be. In addition to which he has the temper of a fiend, when aroused, and you'd be sure to rouse him! You know a dozen men more suitable!" Kitty declared firmly.

"Do I? It seems to me I'm particularly destitute of men friends just now, either 'suitable' or otherwise. They've been giving me the cold shoulder lately with commendable frequency. So why not the M. F. H. and his acres?"

Kitty detected the bitter, hurt note in her voice, and privately congratulated herself on a letter she had posted the previous evening telling Peter that everything was obviously over between Nan and Maryon Rooke, as the latter had failed to put in an appearance at St. Wennys, and would he come down to Mallow Court? With Peter once more at hand, she felt sure he would be able to charm Nan's bitterness away and even prevent her, in some magical way of his own, from committing such a rash blunder as marriage with Trenby could not fail to be.

"Nan, don't be a fool!" she insisted vehemently. "You'd be wretched if you married the wrong man, far, far more wretched in the future than you've ever been in the past. You'd only repent that last step once, and that would be—always!"

Nan rose from her cushions, swinging her hat in her hand.

"Always remember that a prophet hath no honor in his own country," she commented curtly, over her shoulder, and sauntered away toward the house, defiantly humming the air of a scandalous little French song as she went, leaving Kitty to her troubled meditations.

CHAPTER IX.

It was a soft, misty day when Trenby called to drive Nan over to the Trevithick kennels, one of those veiled mornings which break, about noon, into a glory of blue sky and golden sunlight.

She stepped into the waiting car, and Roger proceeded to tuck the rugs well round her. Then he started the engine and soon they were spinning down the drive which ran to the left of the Mallow Court gardens toward the village. They flashed through St. Wennys and turned inland along the great white road that swept away in the direction of Trenby Hall, ten miles distant. The kennels themselves lay four miles beyond the Hall.

"Oh, how gorgeous it is!" exclaimed Nan, as their road cut through a wild piece of open country where, with the sea and the tall cliffs behind them, vista after vista of wooded hills and graciously sloping valleys unfolded in front of them.

"Yes, you get some fine scenery inland," replied Trenby. "And the roads are good for motoring. I suppose you don't ride?" he added.

"Why should you suppose that?"

"Well, one doesn't expect a Londoner to know much about country pursuits."

"Are you imagining I've spent all my life in a Seven Dials' slum?" Nan asked serenely.

"No, no, of course not. But——"

"But country people take a very limited view of a Londoner! We do some-

times get out of town, you know, and some of us can ride and play games quite nicely! As a matter of fact, I hunted when I was about six."

"Oh, then I hope you're staying at Mallow till the hunting season starts? I've a lovely mare I could lend you if you'd let me," Roger offered eagerly.

Nan shook her head and made a hasty gesture of dissent.

"Oh, no, no. Quite honestly, I've not ridden for years, and even if I took up riding once more I should never hunt again. I think"—she shrank a little—"it's too cruel."

Trenby regarded her with ingenuous amazement.

"Crüel!" he exclaimed. "Why, it's sport!"

"Magic word!" Nan's lips curled a little. "You say it's 'sport' as though that made it all right."

"So it does," answered Trenby contentedly.

"It may—for the sportsman. But as far as the fox is concerned, it's sheer cruelty."

Trenby drove on without speaking for a short time. Then he asked suddenly:

"What would you do if your husband hunted?"

"Put up with it, I suppose, just as I should put up with his other faults, if I loved him."

Roger made no answer, but quickened the speed of the car, racing over the level surface of the road, and when next he spoke it was on some other topic.

Half an hour later a solid-looking gray house, built in the substantial Georgian fashion and surrounded by trees, came into view. Roger slowed up as the car passed the gates which guarded the entrance to the drive.

"That's Trenby Hall," he said. "You've never been over yet, but I want you to come some day. I should like you to meet my mother."

A queer little dart of fear shot through Nan as he spoke. She felt as though she were being gradually hemmed in.

"It's a beautiful place," she answered conventionally, though thinking inwardly how she would loathe living in a solid, square mansion of that type, prosaically ugly and shut away from the world by inclosing woods.

Roger looked pleased.

"Yes, it's a fine old place," he said. "Now for the kennels."

Another fifteen minutes brought them to the kennels, Denman, the first whip, meeting them at the gate. He touched his hat and threw a keen glance at Nan.

"Hounds all fit, Denman?" asked Trenby in quick, authoritative tones.

"Yes, sir. All except Wrangler there—he's still a bit stiff on that near hind leg he sprained."

As he spoke, he held open the gate for Nan, who glanced round with lively interest.

"How beautifully clean it all is!" exclaimed Nan.

The whip smiled with obvious delight.

"If you keep hounds, miss, you must keep 'em clean, or they won't be healthy and fit to do their day's work. And a day's hunting is a day's work for hounds, and no mistake."

"How like a woman to remark about cleanliness first of all!" laughed Roger. "A man would have gone straight to look at the hounds before noticing anything else!"

"I'm going now," replied Nan, approaching the bars of one of the inclosures.

It seemed to her as though she was looking at a perfect sea of white-and-tan bodies with slowly waving sterns, while at intervals from the big throats came a murmurous sound rising now and again into a low growl, or the sharp snap of powerful jaws and a whine of rage as several hounds scuffled together over some private disagreement. At

Nan's appearance, drawn by curiosity, some of them approached her gingerly, half suspicious, half as though anxious to make friends; and, knowing no fear of animals, she thrust her hand through the bars and stroked the great heads.

"Can't we go in? They're such dear things!" she begged.

Better not," answered Roger. "They don't always like strangers."

"I'm not afraid," she replied mutinously. "Do just open the gate, anyway, please!"

Trenby hesitated.

"Well——" He yielded unwillingly, but Nan's eyes were rather difficult to resist when they appealed. "Open the gate, then, Denman."

He stood close behind her when the gate was opened, watching the hounds narrowly, and now and again uttering an imperative, "Down, Victor! Get down, Marquis!" when one or the other of the great beasts playfully leaped up against Nan's side, pawing at her in friendly fashion. Meanwhile Denman had quietly disappeared, and when he returned he carried a long-lashed hunting crop in his hand.

Nan was smoothing first one tan head, then another, receiving eager caresses from rough, pink tongues in return, and insensibly she had moved step by step farther into the yard to reach this or that hound as it caught her attention.

"Come back!" called Trenby hastily. "Don't go any farther."

Perhaps the wind carried his voice away from her, or perhaps she was so preoccupied with the hounds that the meaning of his words hardly penetrated her mind. Whichever it may have been, with a low cry of "Oh, you beauty!" she stepped quickly toward Vengeance, a fierce-looking beast with a handsome head and sullen mouth, who had been standing apart, showing no disposition

to join the clamorous, slobbering throng at the gate.

As Nan stretched out her hand to stroke him, the sulky head lifted with a thunderous growl. As though at a given signal, the whole pack seemed to gather round her.

Simultaneously Vengeance leaped, and Nan was only conscious of the ripping of her garments, the sudden pressure of hot bodies round her, and of a blurred sound of hounds baying, the vicious cracking of a whip, and the voices of men shouting.

She sank almost to her knees, instinctively shielding her head and throat with her arms, borne to the ground by the force of the great, padded feet which had struck her. Instantaneously there flashed through her mind the recollection of something she had once been told—that if one hound turns on you, the whole pack will turn with him, like wolves.

She struck out, struggling gamely to her feet, but Vengeance, the untamed, heedless of the lash with which Denman scored his back a dozen times, caught at her ankle and she pitched headforemost into the steam of hot-breathed mouths and struggling bodies. She felt a huge weight fling itself upon her—and even as she waited for the agony of piercing fangs plunged into her flesh, Trenby caught the big, powerful brute by its throat and by sheer physical strength dragged the hound away from her.

Meanwhile, the second whip had arrived to render assistance, and the whistling of the long-lashed hunting crops drove through the air, gradually forcing the yelping hounds into submission. In the midst of the shouting and commotion, Nan felt herself lifted up by Roger as easily as though she were a baby, and at the same moment the whirling lash of one of the men's hunting crops cut her across the throat and bosom. The red-hot agony of it was unbear-

able, and as Trenby bore her out of the yard he felt her body grow suddenly limp in his arms and, glancing down, saw that she had lost consciousness.

When Nan came to herself again it was to find that she was lying on a little horsehair sofa, and the first object upon which her eyes rested was a nightmare arrangement of wax flowers, carefully preserved from risk of damage by a glass shade. She was feeling stiff and sore, and the strangeness of her surroundings bewildered her.

"Where am I?" she asked in a weak voice that was hardly more than a whisper.

Some one—a woman—said quickly:

"Ah, she's coming round!" and bustled out of the room. Then came Roger's voice:

"You're all right, Nan, all right." And she felt his big hands close round her two slender ones, reassuringly. "Don't be frightened."

She raised her head to find Roger kneeling beside the sofa on which she lay.

"I'm not frightened," she said. "Only, what's happened? Oh, I remember! I was in the yard with the hounds. Did one of them bite me?"

"Yes, Vengeance just caught your ankle. But we've bathed it thoroughly—luckily he'd only torn the skin a little—and now I'm going to bind it up for you. Mrs. Denman's just gone to fetch some stuff for me to bind it with. You'll be quite all right again to-morrow."

With some difficulty Nan raised herself to a sitting position and immediately caught sight of a bowl on the floor filled with an ominous-looking, reddish-colored liquid.

"Good gracious!—Has my foot been bleeding like that?" she asked.

"Bless you, no, my dear!" Mrs. Denman, a cheery-faced country

woman, had bustled in again with some long strips of linen for a bandage. "Bless you, no! That's just a drop of Condyl's Fluid, that is, so's your foot shouldn't get any poison in it."

"That's right, Mrs. Denman," said Roger. "Give me that linen stuff now, and then get me some more hot water."

Nan watched Trenby lift and skillfully bandage the injured foot. He held it carefully, as though it were something very precious, but, delicate as was his handling, she could not help wincing once as the bandage accidentally brushed a rather bad scratch. Trenby paused almost breathlessly. The hand in which he held the white, blue-veined foot shook a little.

"Did I hurt? I'm awfully sorry." His voice was gruff. What he wanted to do was to crush the slim, bruised foot against his lips. The very touch of its satiny skin against his hand sent queer little tremors through every nerve of his big frame.

"There!" he said at last, letting her foot rest once more on the sofa. "Is that comfortable?"

"Quite, thanks." Then, turning to the whip's wife as she reentered the room, carrying a jug of hot water, she went on, with that inborn instinct of hers to charm and give pleasure: "What a nice, sunny room you have here, Mrs. Denman. I'm afraid I'm making a dreadful mess of it. I'm so sorry."

"Don't mention it, miss. It's only a drop of water to clear away, and it's God's mercy you weren't killed by them savage hounds."

Nan bestowed one of her delightful smiles upon the good woman, who left the hot water and hurried out to tell her husband that if Miss Davenant was going to be mistress of the Hall, why, then 'twould be a lucky day for every one concerned, for a nicer, pleasanter-spoken young lady she never wished to meet.

Nan put her hand up to her throat.

"Something hurts here," she said in a troubled voice. "Did one of the hounds leap up at my neck?"

"No," replied Trenby, frowning as his eyes rested on the long, red welt striping the white flesh disclosed by the V-shaped neck of her frock. "One of those dunder-headed fools cut you with his whip by mistake. I'd like to shoot him—and Vengeance, too!"

With a wonderfully gentle touch he laid a cloth wrung out in hot water across the angry-looking streak, and repeated the process until some of the swelling went down. At last he desisted, wiping dry the soft, girlish throat as tenderly as a nurse might wipe the throat of a baby.

More than a little touched, Nan smiled at him.

"You're making a great fuss about me," she said. "After all, I'm not seriously hurt, you know."

"No," he replied briefly. "But you might have been killed. For a moment I thought you were going to be killed before my eyes."

"I don't know that it would have mattered very much if I had been," she responded indifferently.

"It would have mattered to me." His voice was rough again. "Nan—Nan—"

He broke off huskily and, casting a swift glance at his face, she realized that the tide which had been gradually rising throughout the foregoing weeks of close companionship had suddenly come to its full and that no puny effort of hers could now arrest it.

Roger had risen to his feet. His face was rather white, as he stood looking down at her, and the piercing eyes beneath the sunburned brows held a new light in them. They were no longer cold, but burned down upon her with the fierce ardor of passion.

"What is it?" she whispered. The

words seemed wrung from her against her will.

For a moment he made no answer, and in the pulsing silence which followed her low-breathed question, Nan was aware of a swiftly gathering fear. She would have to make a decision within the next few moments, and she was not ready for it.

"Do you know?"—Roger spoke very slowly—"do you know what it would have meant to me if you had been killed just now?"

Nan shook her head.

"It would have meant the end of everything."

"Oh, I don't see why!" she responded quickly.

"Don't you?" He stooped over her and took her two slight wrists in his. "Then I'll tell you. I love you and I want you for my wife. I didn't intend to speak so soon, you know so little of me. But this last hour! I can't wait any longer. I want you, Nan, I want you unutterably."

Nan tried to rise from the sofa. But in an instant his arms were round her, pressing her back, tenderly but determinedly, against the cushions.

"No, don't get up! See, I'll kneel here beside you. Tell me, Nan, when will you marry me?"

She was silent. What answer could she give him?

At her silence, a swift fear seized him.

"Nan," he said, his voice a little hoarse, "Nan, is it—no good?" Then, as she still made no answer, he let his arms fall heavily to his sides, and his eyes held a blank, dazed look.

Nan caught him by the arm.

"No, no, Roger!" she cried quickly. "Don't look like that! I didn't mean that I—"

The sudden expression of radiance that sprang into his face silenced the remainder of her words upon her lips,

the words of explanation that should have been spoken.

"Then you do care, after all? Nan, there's no one else, is there?"

"No," she said, very low.

He stretched out his arms and drew her gently within them, and for a moment Nan had neither the heart nor the courage to wipe that look of utter happiness from his face by telling him the truth, by saying blankly: "I don't love you."

He turned her face up to his and, stooping, kissed her with sudden passion.

"My dear!" he said. "My dear! Oh, Nan, Nan, I can hardly believe that you really belong to me!"

Nan could hardly believe it, either. It seemed just to have happened, somehow, and her conscience smote her. For what had she to give in return for all the love he was offering her? Merely a little liking of a lonely heart that wanted to warm itself at some one's hearth, and beyond that a terrified longing to put something more between herself and Peter Mallory, to double the strength of the barrier which kept them apart. It wasn't giving Trenby a fair deal!

"Roger," she said, at last, "I don't think I'd better belong to you. I must tell you. There is some one else—only we can't ever be more than friends."

Roger stared at her with the dawning of a new fear in his eyes. When he spoke, it was with a savage defiance.

"I'm not going to listen. You've said you'll marry me. I don't want to hear anything about the other men who were. I'm the man who is. And I'm going to drive you straight back to Mallow and tell everybody about it. Then I'll feel sure of you."

Faced by the irrevocableness of her action, Nan was overtaken by dismay. How recklessly, on the impulse of the moment, she had bartered away her freedom! A voice inside her head kept

urging: "Time! Time! Give me time!"

"Please, Roger," she began with unwonted humility, "I'd rather you didn't tell people just yet."

But Trenby objected.

"I don't see that there's anything to be gained by waiting," he said doggedly.

"Time! Time!" reiterated the voice inside Nan's head.

"To please me, Roger," she begged.

"I want to think things over a bit, first."

"It's too late to think things over," he answered jealously. "You've given me your promise. You don't want to take it back again?"

"Perhaps, when you know everything, you'll want me to."

"Tell me 'everything' now, then," he said grimly, "and you'll soon see whether I want you to or not."

Nan was fighting desperately to gain time. The past was pulling at her heartstrings, filling her with a sudden terror of the promise she had given him.

"I can't tell you anything now," she said, a little breathlessly. "I did try—a little while ago and you wouldn't listen. You—you must give me a few days, you must! If you don't, I'll say 'no,' now—at once!"

She was overwrought, strung up to such a pitch that she hardly knew what she was saying. She had been through a good deal in the last hour or two and Trenby realized it. Suddenly that grim determination of his to force her promise, to bind her here and now, yielded to an overwhelming flood of tenderness.

"It shall be as you wish, Nan," he said very gently. "I know I'm asking everything of you, and that you're frightened and upset to-day. I ought not to have spoken. And—and I'm a lot older than you."

"Oh, it isn't that," replied Nan hastily. She did not want him to be hurt about things that would never have counted at all had she loved him.

"Well, if I wait till Monday—that's four days—will that do?" he asked.

"Yes. I'll tell you then."

"Thank you." He lifted her hands to his lips. "And remember," he added desperately, "that I love you, Nan. You're my whole world!"

He paced the short length of the room and back, and when he came to her side again, every trace of emotion was wiped out of his face.

"Now I'm going to take you back home. Mrs. Denman says she'll put a hassock in the car for your damaged leg to rest on, and with rugs and your coat, I think you'll be all right."

He went to the table and poured out something in a glass.

"Drink that," he said, holding it toward her. "It'll warm you up."

Nan sniffed at the liquid in the glass and gave it back to him with a grimace.

"It's brandy," she said. "I hate the stuff."

"But you'll drink it, won't you? It will be good for you." He stood in front of her, glass in hand. "Come, Nan, don't be foolish. You need something before we start. Please drink it."

He held it to her lips, and Nan, too proud to struggle or resist like a child, swallowed the obnoxious stuff. As Trenby drove her home she had time to reflect upon the fact that, if she married him, there would be many a contest of wills between them. He roused a sense of rebellion in her, and he was, unmistakably, a man who meant to be obeyed.

Her thoughts went back to Peter Mallory. Somehow, she did not think she would ever have found it difficult to obey him.

CHAPTER X.

Kitty and her husband were strolling together on the terrace when Trenby's car purred up the drive to Mallow, and

both ran forward as they recognized Nan and Roger.

"You're back very early!" exclaimed Kitty gayly. "Did you get bored stiff with each other, or what?" Then, as Roger opened the car door and she caught sight of Nan's leg stretched out in front of her under the rugs, she asked, with a note of fear in her voice: "Is Nan hurt? You've not had an accident?"

Roger hastily explained what had occurred.

"She's had a wonderful escape," he concluded.

He was looking rather drawn about the mouth, as though he, too, had passed through a big strain of some kind.

"I'm as right as rain, really," called out Nan reassuringly. "If some one will only unpack the collection of rugs and coats I'm bundled up with, I can hop out of the car as well as anybody."

Barry was already at the side of the car, and as he lifted off the last covering, revealing beneath a distended silk stocking the bandaged ankle, he exclaimed quickly:

"Hullo! This looks like some sort of damage. Is your ankle badly hurt, old thing?"

"Not a bit, nothing but a few scratches," she answered. "Only Mrs. Denman insisted on my driving back with my leg up, and it would have broken her heart if I hadn't accepted her hassock for the journey."

She stepped rather stiffly out of the car, for her joints still ached, and Barry, seeing her white face and the heavy shadows beneath her eyes, put a strong, friendly arm around her shoulders to steady her.

"You've had a good shaking up, my dear, anyway," he observed, with concern in his voice. "Look, I'm going to help you into the hall and put you on the big divan. Then we'll discuss

what's to be done with you," he added, smiling down at her.

"You won't let them keep me in bed, Barry, will you?" urged Nan, as he helped her up the steps and into the great hall.

Barry pulled thoughtfully at his big, fair mustache.

"If Kitty says 'bed,' you know it'll have to be bed," he answered, his eyes twinkling a little.

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed crossly. "You don't stay in bed because you've scratched your ankle."

"No. But you must remember you've had a bit of a shock."

By this time Kitty and Roger had joined them, overhearing the last part of the conversation.

"Of course you'll go to bed at once," asserted Kitty firmly. "Will you give her a hand upstairs, Barry?"

"You see?" said Barry, regarding the patient humorously. "Come along, Nan! Shall I carry you or will you hobble?"

"I'll walk," returned Nan, with emphasis.

"Bed's much the best place for you," put in Roger.

He followed her to the foot of the staircase and, as he shook hands, he said quietly:

"Till Monday, then."

Barry assisted Nan upstairs, in spite of her protests, and they paused outside the door of her bedroom, to discuss the happenings of the day. They were still chatting when Kitty swished round the bend.

"Nan, you ought to be in bed by now!" protested Kitty severely. "You're not to be trusted one minute, Barry, keeping her standing about talking like this."

She shooed her big husband away with a single wave of her arm and marshaled Nan into the bedroom. In her hand she carried a tray on which was a glass of hot milk.

"There," she continued, addressing Nan. "You've got to drink that while you're undressing, and then you'll sleep well. And you're not to come down tomorrow except for dinner. I'll send your meals up—you shan't be starved! But you must have a thorough rest."

"Oh, Kitty!" Nan's exclamation was a positive wail of dismay.

Kitty cheerfully dismissed any possibility of discussion.

"It's quite settled, my dear. You'll be feeling it far worse to-morrow than you do to-day. So get into bed now as quickly as possible."

"This milk's absolutely boiling," complained Nan irritably. "I can't drink it."

"Then undress and drink it when you're in bed. I'll brush your hair for you."

It goes without saying that Kitty had her way and before long Nan was sipping her glass of milk and gratefully realizing the illimitable comfort which a soft bed brings to weary limbs.

"By the way, I've some news for you," announced Kitty, as she sat perched on the edge of the bed.

"News? What news?"

"Well, guess who's coming here?"

Nan named one or two mutual friends only to be met by a triumphant negative. Finally Kitty divulged her secret.

"Why, Peter Mallory!"

The glass in Nan's hand jerked suddenly, spilling a few drops of the milk.

"Peter?" She strove to keep all expression out of her voice.

"Yes. He finds he can come, after all. Isn't it jolly?"

"Very jolly."

Nan's tones were so noncommittal that Kitty looked at her with some surprise.

"Aren't you pleased?" she asked blankly.

"Of course, I'm pleased!" Nan forced the obviously expected enthusiasm into her affirmative, then, swallowing the last

mouthful of milk with an effort, she added: "It'll be topping."

Kitty took the glass from her.

"Now try and have a good sleep," she admonished and departed, blissfully unconscious of how effectually she herself had just destroyed any possibility of slumber.

Peter coming! The first thrill of pure joy at the thought of seeing him again was succeeded by a rush of apprehension. She felt herself caught up into a whirlpool of conflicting emotions. The idea of marriage with Roger Trenby seemed even more impossible than ever with the knowledge that, in a few days, Peter would be there, close beside her with his quiet, comprehending gaze, while every nerve in her body would be vibrating at the mere touch of his hand.

She could visualize each line of his face; the level brows and the steady, gray-blue eyes under them, eyes that missed so little and understood so much; the sensitive mouth with those rather tired lines which cleft each side of it and deepened when he smiled; the lean cheek bones and squarish chin. The memory of Peter was like a hand holding her back from casting in her lot with Roger.

And then the pendulum swung back and she felt that to marry some one, any one, was the only thing left to her. She was frightened by her love for Peter. Marriage, she argued, would be—must be—a shield and buckler against the cry of her heart. If she were married, she would be able to stifle her love, crush it out, behind those solid, unyielding bars of conventional wedlock.

The fact of Peter's own marriage seemed to her rather dreamlike. There lay the danger. They had not met until long after his wife had left him, so that her impression of him as a married man was necessarily somewhat vague and shadowy.

But there would be nothing vague or shadowy about marriage with Trenby! That Nan realized. And, utterly weary

of the persistent struggle in her heart, she felt that it might cut the whole tangle of her life once and for all, if she passed through the narrow gate of matrimony into the carefully shepherded fold beyond it. After all, most women settled down to it, finally, whether their husbands came up to standard or not. If they didn't, the majority of wives contrived to put up with the disappointment,

and probably she herself would be so fully occupied with the putting up part of the business, that she would not have much time in which to remember Peter.

But perhaps, had she known the inner thoughts of those women who had been driven into the "putting up" attitude toward their husbands, she would have realized that memories do not die so easily.

TO BE CONTINUED.



NOCTURNE

THINE is the moon's face, quiet, blank and white,
Stripped of all suffering and all desire,
Lost in the dark infinitude of night,
Save for the living sun's reflected fire.

Thou dwell'st like her, in those blue, empty deeps
Where time and space themselves begin—and cease,
And silence undisturbed forever sleeps,
And there has been, and always will be, peace.

Out of the clashing ache of joy and strife,
Obedient as the tides, we feel thy pull,
And tremble at the frailty of Life,
And fear thee, Death—thou art so beautiful.

JOSEPHINE A. MEYER.



Kings of Hearts

By Anick Terhune

Author of "More Super-Women"

Franz Liszt:

Adored of Countless Women

A LONG, thin man, with a mane of dark hair, sat at a piano. He was not playing. He was posing. He was posing for the benefit of no less than six women.

All six were famous young painters; and all six were hopelessly in love with the long, thin man. One by one they had besought him to let them paint his portrait as he sat playing.

At first he had refused. He was busy and he was nervous and he was not vain. Already he had wasted more time in posing for various portraits than pleased him. But the sextet of artists would not take "No." Each of them counted on utilizing those hours of posing by making herself attractive enough to win the sitter's heart.

Finally, worn out by their entreaties, he sent notes to all of them, bidding them come to his studio the next morning to begin sittings. Rapturously they obeyed the summons. On reaching the bare and workmanly room—so different from the cluttered and extravagant studios of lesser geniuses—each of the six found to her horror that there were to be five other artists present.

Amid bitter heartburnings they set to work. First, there were squabbles as to the pose. When every one was content with the attitude in which the sitter had placed himself, they fell to work, eager to outrival one another in the excellence of the portrait.

But before the swiftest of them had so much as blocked in the roughest outlines the pose was lost. It was lost because the man had slumped over the piano and was sound asleep. And when they succeeded in awakening him, he "woke up cross" and declared he had no more time for such nonsense.

This boorishness was not an affectation. He was surfeited with adoration. It meant nothing to him that a half dozen brilliant and beautiful women worshiped him to the point of craving the honor to sit together in the same room with him and paint his portrait.

The man was Franz Liszt, a Hungarian, a Heaven-gifted musician and the son of a musician. Incidentally, he was the foremost heartbreaker of his day. No woman, high or low, rich or poor, seemed to have the power to resist him. Nor did he seek for romance.

He had no need to. To the day of his death, it was his without the seeking.

"So long as he lived, silly women, dazzled by his genius and his personality, flew into the blaze of his attraction as moths singe their wings in the blaze of a torch," says Dole, his biographer.

What quality, or strange blend of qualities, in a man make him a King of Hearts? That is a question which finds no answer.

Is it good looks? John Wilkes and Liszt and several other world-famed heartbreakers were distinctly ugly.

Is it cleverness? One glance at the long array of *matinée* heroes disproves that.

Is it magnetism? Napoleon was the most magnetic man of his century. In his last illness he said bitterly that no woman except his old nurse had ever truly loved him.

Assuredly it is not mere gentleness and courtesy. Countless women have deserted gentle and courteous husbands or sweethearts for brutes.

No, the quality is as nameless as it is mystic. Yet, now and then, throughout the ages, its possession has blessed—or cursed—some exceptional man.

And, ever, trouble has followed in its wake. Sometimes the trouble smote the Kings of Hearts themselves. Oftener it smote their adorers. But invariably it smote their wives. These wives are the inevitable losers in the alluring, sorry game of Hearts.

Read this description of Liszt, and try to figure out what—apart, of course, from the irresistible magic of his music—the charm could have been:

"He was lean, with the figure and face of an Indian, rather than of an European. He had harshly strong features, an aquiline beak of a nose—with which he learned to strike notes on the piano—a Jovellike brow, and a lionlike mane of coarse hair which fell almost to his shoulders. Court ladies used to

snatch up his discarded cigar butts and treasure them as sacred souvenirs."

Born in 1811, Liszt began to play in public by the time he was eleven, and he began to compose wonderful music only a little while later. By the time he came to his mid-teens, his career as a King of Hearts had set in. In the first heyday of his success, and before he had had time to tire of feminine adulation, came the great love affair of his life.

At a diplomatic reception he met exquisite little Caroline, daughter of the Comte de Saint Cricq. And, on sight, Liszt fell crazily in love with her. A few years earlier any commoner—even such a petted darling of the musical world—would have been horsewhipped or imprisoned or exiled for daring to lift his eyes to the daughter of a French nobleman. But times had changed in France. One revolution after another had shaken the nobility's faith in their own divine right to look down on genius.

As a result, the young musician was allowed to meet Caroline far oftener and with fewer restrictions than might have been expected. She reciprocated his love—as did every other woman he deigned to smile on. The two became engaged. Liszt was gloriously happy. Turning a deaf ear to the wiles of all other women, he devoted himself, heart and soul, to the dainty little aristocrat who had promised to be his wife.

Naturally, even at that time, in France there were many barriers to such free-and-easy association between youth and maid as is known in Anglo-Saxon lands. But Liszt surmounted these. He won the approval and consent of Caroline's mother to the match. Everything seemed to be going smoothly.

But, suddenly, the Comte de Saint Cricq took a hand in the love game. At first, he had given grudging assent to the young Magyar's attentions to his

daughter. Now, a richer and loftier born suitor applied to the count for Caroline's hand. Saint Cricq broke off her engagement to Liszt, forcing her to marry the man of his own choice.

Girls—French girls especially—had no voice in their own marriage arrangements in those days. They wedded the man their parents picked out for them. They had no alternative. And, weeping, Caroline obeyed her father's commands, giving up the man she loved and marrying the man she loathed. Thus she passes out of our story.

Liszt made no effort to rally from this blow which had smashed his heart. He threw aside his career, his music, his friends—his old life and the golden future which stretched so invitingly before him. He went into hermitlike retirement. He refused to touch the piano; he shrank from meeting any one.

A melancholy, which was really a form of insanity, possessed him. Steadily he grew worse. All women were abhorrent to him. He shut himself up in his room in a squalid Paris street and moped. This went on for three years.

One morning the quiet air of his street was split by a most ungodly racket. All Paris was quaking from a heavy cannonade. A new revolution had set in. It wasn't much of a revolution, but, while it lasted, it made lots of noise. And it had one remarkable effect.

For, at the first crash of cannonading, Liszt sprang up, shocked into new life. He rushed to his dust-choked piano, and began to play on it like mad. Before he left the instrument he had composed a tremendously thunderous symphony, inspired by the revolution.

The spell was broken. Back to the world came Liszt, and at once his return was hailed with joy by all music lovers and by society at large. Once more throngs of women idolized him. But his three years of lonely heart-

9—Ains.

ache had changed him. Henceforth he was content to be adored, instead of adoring. Henceforth it was the women, and not he, who must do the wooing. Oftener than not he was frankly bored by their attentions. And he made no secret of his boredom.

Out of the army of fair ones, now, his languid choice settled on Marie, Comtesse d'Agoult. Marie had a husband who loved her, but, at sight of Liszt, she decided to leave him.

For several years Marie and Liszt lived openly as man and wife. The husband now and then objected. But Marie paid no heed at all to his complaints. She and Liszt had three children. One of these—a daughter named Cosima—later married Richard Wagner, the composer, who owed his recognition to Liszt's championship.

By and by Liszt decided there were other women in the world beside Marie. He said so—or something to the same effect.

It chanced to be at one of the times when her husband was making his periodical bid for reconciliation. So Marie—older and, it is to be hoped, wiser—returned to her original mate and all was forgiven.

One wonders, perhaps morbidly, what the home life and the conversations and the inner thoughts of a couple, thus reconciled, can be like, particularly when the lover is a celebrity like Liszt, whose name is on the public tongue and cannot be glozed over or allowed to drop into oblivion.

The next one of any special importance in Liszt's page of victims was the stately and music-loving Princess Sayne-Wittgenstein. She sent for him to come to her palace at Weimar, and set aside for him the most resplendent suite in the palace. She begged leave to become his wife, even at risk of losing her royal rank.

But Germany raised hands of holy horror at the mere thought of this sac-

rilege. And practically every high dignitary in the country fought to prevent the marriage. As Liszt does not seem to have cared very much whether he married her or not, and as the princess was not strong enough to withstand the combined weight of authority arrayed against the match, there was no wedding.

But there might as well have been. Presumably, the stodgy royal personages were more concerned in blocking a misalliance than with mere morality. For Liszt continued to occupy his gorgeous suite at the palace until, in 1861, he wearied of the princess, or of her surroundings, and resolved to move on.

Though he was fifty, now, and his mane of hair was snow-white, Liszt had lost none of his mystic charm for women or his power over them. Four professional beauties, who sighed for his favor, hit on a plan to immortalize themselves. They clubbed together and commissioned a famous artist to paint portraits of all four of them, as caryatids, upholding a white-marble bust of Liszt.

Europe gasped. Liszt only grinned. His head was not to be turned, or his affections won, by such a flashy trick.

He went on a music tour through several Russian cities. Annoyed by overmany sloppy attentions, he came into St. Petersburg stealthily and by night. He reached his hotel unrecognized, and congratulated himself on having attained a few hours of quiet.

But when he tried to go out for a walk, early the next morning, he stopped short, on the steps of his hotel, at sight of hundreds of women—some in diamonds and furs, others in rags and dirt—massed in the street before him.

The moment he appeared this phalanx of women made a wild rush for him. They surged up the steps of the hotel before he could retreat. They seized him and lifted him high on their

frail shoulders. They kissed his hands and the hem of his coat and his newly polished shoes. They wound up this hero-worship performance by crowning him with a magnificent wreath of roses.

This was but one instance out of many. The man simply could not get women to leave him alone. Evasion, boredom, even insults—none of these had any deterring effect on his swarms of adorers. Perhaps never in the history of fascination has any one man had more worship from women than Franz Liszt.

If I have given you an idea that he tried to fascinate or that he was smugly proud of his innumerable conquests, then the fault has been all mine. He was neither. He made no capital out of his strange gifts. Love came to him unsought.

And he was not only one of the world's immortal musicians, but he was forever helping and encouraging less fortunate composers. A single instance, out of many, may be cited to show this:

Richard Wagner was a half-starved exile in Switzerland. Nobody cared for his odd new music. He could get no recognition and he could not keep himself in clothes and food.

Liszt worked hard and used all his own great influence to get a hearing for Wagner and to interest the public in the hungry young German's music. He produced "Lohengrin" through his personal efforts and largely at his own expense, and he lectured and wrote of its beauties until people began to take the queer musician on Liszt's say-so.

Meantime, Wagner wrote him not less than a dozen begging letters. And Liszt sent him big sums of money in answer to each and all of them. Wagner is said to have shown scant gratitude to the man who kept him from starving and whose influence brought him recognition. At the bottom of one

of his letters to Liszt the exile wrote the words:

Remember the 31st of July. Farewell!

This was as far back as 1856. Nobody—except Wagner himself and possibly Liszt—knew what the odd phrase meant.

The letter was found on Liszt's death, thirty years later. And it had a weird significance. For Liszt died on July 31, 1886. Prophecy or coincidence?

Time at last began to break down the iron body and to fill the harsh face

with a million deep lines. Liszt's health went to pieces. He knew he was going to die. And he prepared to meet the Unknown as gayly and carelessly as he had met the love affairs where-with his long life had been strewn.

A few days before his death a woman who had loved him, and who still loved him, came into the room where the dying man sat, propped up in a pillowed chair. Gallant to the last, he said apologetically:

"You will forgive me for remaining seated? You see, they are putting my boots on for the Long Journey."



WHEN SPRING COMES BACK TO GILEAD

WHEN spring comes back to Gilead,
I wonder will she find
Her flaming squills of April
That once she left behind?
Will there be jonquils blowing—
And amber, whirring bees,
And dainty, petaled shimmering
Of dogwood trees?

When spring comes back to Gilead
In blazing whirl of white,
With tripping toe—and singing
Across the scented night,
Out of her world of lovers
Oh, will she miss us two
If we should fail this year to keep
Our rendezvous?

When spring comes back to Gilead,
O Heart of Me! who knows
But pride may be forgotten
In every flower that blows—
And hearts that now are yearning
May flame to life and sing,
When spring comes back to Gilead—
And warm lips cling!

MARION FRANCIS BROWN.

"Just My Little Girl"

By
James Francis Dwyer

Author of
"Goliath Gamble and Fate,"
"Jambalaya," etc.



IT is exceedingly rare that a man of forty-five is the possessor of looks that force people, when describing his appearance, to use the word beautiful. A modified "beautiful," possibly. They applied to the unmasculine adjective words such as strangely, terrifyingly, devilishly, but they used beautiful. Women especially.

The man was Crandon Grace, only son of Hamilton Grace, the copper king. He had valiently countered the attacks of those five-and-forty years by bringing to his face a queer quality that blinded observers. It was a curtain under which he hid unlovable traits and the marks made by the years. Not exactly a curtain; a counterattraction is a better phrase. Most persons—all women who saw him, certainly—read on the face of Crandon Grace a record of what he had done in those forty-five years, and they observed that record before discovering what the years had done to him.

It was a curious lure. Women have possessed it in the past. It is the frank acknowledgment of gentle debauchery worn with grace. Ninon de l'Enclos was a notable example. She made her most extraordinary conquests in her sixties and seventies when, as the Great Condé, one of her victims, wrote: "To sit and look at her face is like a glorious plunge into pretty sins."

Crandon Grace was, to his own sex, "bad." The stories which tell how the beautiful Ninon was loved by all women are certainly false. Let us be frank. The requisite charity needful to produce love for persons of our own sex who make our shortcomings infamously perceptible is only found in members of religious orders that require celibacy.

Crandon Grace had an apartment in Gramercy Square, a very discreet and rather curiously furnished apartment. It contained pieces that had lived with persons of unenviable reputation, pieces that Grace loved on account of their connection. It is queer that, in the matter of antiques, the vices and not the virtues of former possessors increase the value of the piece. The couch of a Du Barry has a value far above the bed of a saint.

Crandon Grace had a chair that he loved. It was a huge, embroidered thing that had once belonged to the distinguished English poisoner and dilettante, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright. In it the essayist had sat when he planned the poisoning of his uncle, his mother-in-law, and his sister-in-law, and in it Crandon Grace often sat when he planned poisonings—poisonings of souls!

Crandon Grace, wrapped in an Oriental dressing gown, was sitting in this chair on a wild night in January when

he was disturbed by his manservant, a silent, deft-fingered Italian who had been in his service for fifteen years and who performed all the work of the apartment.

"The telephone, sir," he murmured. "A lady, sir."

"Did she give a name?"

"No, sir."

"Connect me here. Hand me the phone."

The servant handed the instrument to his master and hurried back to the hall to make the connection. Crandon Grace, receiver to his ear, waited. It was near midnight, and he was conscious in the little interval of expectancy of the fury of the storm without. A cyclone was raging. His ears, roused to catch the opening words of the person on the wire amused themselves by absorbing the different sounds which came from the street—the wild stamping of the storm stallions, the scratching of a wind-harried waterspout, the occasional soft slither of snow from roof and window sills. Grace commented to himself.

"Streets impassable," he muttered. "I'll wager there isn't a cab out."

The servant was slow in making the connection. Grace remembered that the fellow was upset. He had stammeringly announced, while serving dinner, that his wife was very ill and he had asked permission to leave early. Grace had refused the request. He wished a bath before retiring and he had told the fellow to wait and prepare it.

Grace recalled the tired, sallow-faced wife, with unpleasant emotions. Once, when the man's family lived in the basement of the house, she had annoyed Crandon Grace by a half accusation. He thought then of discharging the man, but the fellow apologized profusely and begged to remain on. Grace had granted the request, but had stipulated that the servant and his family find other quarters, which they did.

Then to his ears the voice came over the telephone. A particularly quavery voice. It rushed into the ears of Crandon Grace with fear tramping on the heels of the words, so to speak, stampeding them, causing them to lose their spacing intervals. They came abreast instead of in line, resembling a flock of dog-harried sheep bursting through a hurdle.

"Oh, Mr. Grace! Please listen to me, Mr. Grace! It's Mr. Crandon Grace, isn't it? The letters—all the letters—say Crandon Grace, and there's only one Crandon Grace in the telephone book. It must be you, and I want you to listen! I want——"

"One moment!" cried Grace. "One moment, please! Who is speaking?"

The voice died into a gurgle; the elastic string of emotion that had caused it to surge forward was broken by the cold question. Grace had a tone for hysterical females that he was really proud of.

The voice came again, still dog-harried, but now terrified of the dangers before it. More apologetic.

"I—I can't remember my name, Mr. Grace! I can't! I can't! Please, please, listen! It seems silly, but—oh, listen to me! I was going somewhere—somewhere important—somewhere where I was going to do something that would be pleasant. Something that I—I seemed longing for. Oh, I remember that much! Then I slipped on the pavement outside the subway entrance and I fell and struck my head. A lady took me to her home. She's here beside me now. I'm—I'm telephoning from her house. She doesn't know me—no one knows me, and—and I don't know my own name! Are you listening? I—I don't know my name or where I live or where I was going!"

Crandon Grace steadied himself. The little plotting devils responsible for the tranquillity of Mr. Crandon Grace were in full conclave in the rear of Mr.

Grace's mind. They advised caution, great caution. They drew attention to the novelty of the attack.

"Question her," they whispered. "But don't commit yourself! There's brain in this hussy or in the folk who put her up to this trick."

So Crandon Grace flung a query into the mouthpiece—a mouthpiece, by the way, which represented the parted lips of Psyche done in shell china which Crandon Grace, in defiance of the rules of the telephone company, used in place of the unromantic vulcanite.

"What am I to do with all this nonsense? What do you mean?"

They were questions with icicle trimmings. He was pleased with the zero atmosphere which wrapped the words. The little guardian devils in the back of his mind were pleased.

There was a brief interval of silence; then, for the first time, Crandon Grace heard the stronger voice. He called it the stronger voice to differentiate it from the voice. The owner of the stronger voice was speaking to the owner of the voice, speaking very close to the instrument, because Grace could hear her words distinctly. It was a woman's voice.

"Tell him," said the second unknown, that the only clew to your identity is the bundle of letters."

Crandon Grace braced himself. The little plotting devils were alert.

"Letters!" they whispered. "Letters!" Again they spoke of extreme caution, of listeners, of damage actions, of blackmail. "There's a trap somewhere!" they whispered. "Go slow! It smells like blackmail!"

The voice, so Crandon Grace thought, was protesting softly against the instructions given by the owner of the stronger voice. Grace told himself that he did not like the stronger voice. It suggested a calm, large female, conversant with the ways of men like Crandon Grace. It was the voice of virtue.

"Are you there, Mr. Grace?" It was the quavery, timid voice which asked. "Are you listening?"

"I am listening," said the occupant of Mr. Wainwright's chair.

"Listen, please! Please do!" Again the words were stamped dreadfully. "When I fell and hurt my head I—oh, please believe me! This is so important! When I fell there was nothing to tell who I was. There was nothing with my name on it. Nothing at all. But—but—there were letters with—your name on them. Letters—seven letters! The lady found your name in the telephone book and—and I rang you up."

Crandon Grace sat with brows drawn tight over cold, gray eyes. He cursed his rather foolish habit of signing all letters with his full name.

"How did the letters begin?" he asked. "I mean the opening words?"

The answer was prompt.

"Just 'My Little Girl.'"

Grace, for an instant, felt bitterly unromantic. He felt that those little protective devils, bred by deceit, were snickering. "Just My Little Girl!" Time crept in under his guard and jolted him hard. For just an instant he looked old, felt old.

He roused himself immediately. His position was ridiculous. The little devils advised him to put an end to the conversation.

"Listen," he said, his voice stern and cold, "I am afraid I cannot help you in the least. I do not recognize your voice, and if you do not know your own name, I cannot discover it. As for the letters—well, I write many letters."

There was a sharp gasp of pain and dismay, a far-off, murmured explanation, a protest; then the stronger voice leaped boldly at the ears of Crandon Grace.

"Mr. Grace," began the stronger voice, "this young lady in my home has

told you truthfully just what happened. She slipped and fell at the subway entrance at Ninety-sixth Street. She cannot remember her name or address, and the storm makes it impossible for me to bring her to your house."

Grace was startled.

"I wouldn't see her!" he cried angrily.

"Why not?" questioned the stronger voice.

"Because I do not know her!"

"But she has a little bundle of letters written by you! She——"

Crandon Grace interrupted irritably.

"What is the idea behind this crazy business?" he cried. "What is the game?"

"What do you mean?" The stronger voice showed surprise and healthy resentment.

"Is it—is it blackmail?" cried Grace. "Are you—are you hinting that I should buy these letters?"

There was a moment of appalling silence—a silence which startled Grace. Then the stronger voice came back with a quiet strength and pride which made the listener wince.

"You would like to know my name! I am Mrs. Eleanor Vanbard, wife of the Honorable Thomas Jefferson Vanbard."

There was another moment of silence; then the stronger voice went on:

"As we cannot make the journey to your apartment, and as it would be evidently asking too much of you to make an effort to come here, I will read little extracts from these letters. Surely you will remember the name of the person to whom you wrote them! They are undated and they are much creased. In some places the words are undecipherable. They have been read and reread, I should imagine. It is a light-brown note paper, single sheets with deckle edges and a big circular watermark with

a wolf in the center and the word 'Romulus' in the circle."

Grace pinched the padded arm of Wainwright's chair to relieve his feelings. For an instant he hated the wonderful Italian note paper which was imported specially for his needs. He told himself that he would have to change it immediately. He thought, foolishly perhaps, that the woman had accented the word "wolf."

The stronger voice proceeded.

"It begins 'My Little Girl,' there is a long dash, then the following: 'Make it Sunday—Sunday at nine! It always seems nice to pick the nicest day for nice happenings. Every little piping minute sings of you. Your smile—strange, mystical, incomprehensible—is the smile of Mona Lisa. Your——'"

Crandon Grace uttered a soft "damn." A very soft "damn." The stronger voice halted in the reading, paused a moment as if considering the interruption, then put a question.

"Do you recall to whom you wrote that letter?"

"No, I do not!" snarled Grace.

"Strange!"

"It is not strange."

Again there was silence. The stronger voice leaped forward bravely, new hope surging in it.

"Why, I forgot to describe this child! She is only about nineteen, I should say. Dark hair and sweet, brown eyes. Not tall. Just a modest, soft, little girl with red lips and beautiful teeth. She——" There was an interruption, and Grace heard a murmured protest not intended for his ears. "Don't be silly, little child! I must tell him all about you. How are we to find out your name unless we make him remember?"

A hot flush of anger swept over Grace. The incident was sordid, it was nauseating to his aesthetic soul. He wished heartily that the owner of the stronger voice would fall dead at the telephone. He visualized her with a

mental telescope of hate. A tall, well-built woman with a calm, untroubled face, wearing black, possibly interested in welfare work, feeding poor school children or something of the sort. He saw her distinctly. He knew the breed. Fools spoke of them as the salvation of the race, the mothers of men. They talked on dry subjects. On literature and civics—whatever the devil civics meant; they attended lectures by people that Crandon Grace thought of as lunatics whenever he thought of them at all. They wore common-sense shoes. He had often wondered what they were like when young. They possibly were never young. They all seemed thirty-five or over.

The stronger voice thrust itself pertinently into Grace's thoughts.

"Now do you recognize my description?"

"No!" he shouted. "I do not recognize the description in any way!"

"Let me read you another letter," said the tormentor. "It's the newest-looking letter of the bundle; possibly the last written by you. It starts the same as the other; I mean the 'My Little Girl.' Then it runs: 'You'd better forget me. Don't be bitter. Sweet, little girls like you should not keep nasty, mean thoughts in their heads. Their little brains should be filled with thoughts of ice cream, theater tickets, the shops on the Avenue, boys. You've had a good time and——'"

Crandon Grace flung the receiver back upon its hook. He picked up a vellum-bound copy of "La Rotisserie de la Reine Pedauque" and hurled it across the room. The woman was detestable, dreadful, devilish! She was a killer of romance—Grace's kind of romance. Why had she taken the girl to her house? Why hadn't she left the foolish, little thing in the subway station where she would surely have remembered her silly, old name sooner or later?

He recalled a woman of the reformer type who had ridden with him on an express to Philadelphia. She had got into conversation with his companion and had asked her if she had friends in Philadelphia. He, Grace, had told her to mind her own business, but he didn't feel happy till she left the train. The woman had sat and stared at him as if he was an escaped convict.

The telephone rang violently. Grace swore fiercely. It rang again, and he tore the receiver from its hook.

"Is it Mr. Grace?" It was the voice of the tormentor again.

"What is it?" shouted Grace.

"Central must have cut me off," said the tormentor. "I wonder if——"

"I cut you off!" screamed Grace. "I did it!"

"But I want to know if you recognized the second letter?" protested the speaker.

"I do not! Do you hear me! I do not remember writing such a letter!"

He told himself he lied. The letter was one of Grace's "form letters"—both letters were. Poor, old Mona Lisa, with her inscrutable smile had been used relentlessly by Crandon Grace. And the "don't be bitter" advice had worked well. It was appealing and yet showed no weakness. It was good stuff to suggest other pleasures—the Avenue, theaters, and boys. A little complimentary from a man of the world, yet, withal, a plainly put notification that he would not be bullied or blackmailed.

Possibly the owner of the stronger voice detected the lie. Her voice took on a muscular quality, a quality which suggested to Grace the possibility that fingers would reach out of the receiver and take him by the ear.

"Surely that is unbelievable!" cried the tormentor. "At some time or other it is evident that you made love to this girl, and——"

"What if I did?" screamed Grace. "What is it to you?" He detected a

note of hysteria in his own voice and he repeated the words in an effort to gauge his self-control. "What is it to you?" he cried. The hysteria was still there. "Damn the woman!" he thought. "She's got me screaming like a parrot!"

"Listen," came the woman's voice, "if the storm subsides a little and I can get a taxicab, I will bring her to your apartment and——"

"I won't see her!" interrupted Grace. "I won't see you! No one comes to my apartment!"

"But this is important!"

"I don't care! It's not my business!"

"I will have to acquaint the police!"

"Acquaint any one you like! You can't bully me!"

"You are talking nonsense," retorted the woman.

Grace was a little unstrung now.

"I'm not! It's you!" he screamed. "It's you who are talking nonsense!"

There came a little interval of quiet; then the stronger voice came to Crandon Grace in a soothing, pleading manner. It was the voice of a wise mother speaking to an angry child.

"Mr. Grace," it began, "won't you forget about our words and try to do this for the sake of the little girl? Not this minute! Wait a little while—ten minutes, say—and then I will call you up again. I am not attempting to criticize you. I am trying to help a little girl who is in trouble. Won't you try to remember and I will call up in ten minutes?"

"I won't be able to remember," growled Grace.

"But you might. You might think of her name at any moment."

"I know I won't."

"Try! Please, please try! She's crying! Oh, please try!"

Grace's jaws worked convulsively. All reason was upset by hate.

"I don't want anything to do with

the matter," he muttered. "I wish I——"

"Make a little effort," persisted the stronger voice. "Just spend a few minutes thinking. I'll call you in fifteen minutes. Please!"

Grace, weary and upset, thrust the receiver on to the hook and stared at the red-lipped mouthpiece. He told himself—or at least the little guardian devils told him—that he had been weak to agree to the suggestion. He should have told the woman to go to Hong-kong or some place equally remote. It was a painfully ridiculous happening. He had always prided himself on the cleverness—sometimes he thought of it as genius—that he displayed in connection with his little affairs. He thought he habitually exhibited a graceful tact—old-fashioned when viewed from the continental standpoint, but remarkably modern when looked at with American eyes—a charmingly languid and yet alert control. He thought of himself as a reincarnation of a French dandy of the sweet, romantic days, gifted with all the dandy's grace and charm in addition to that extra fillip which comes to the clever, bad person who resides in what he views as a pharisaical community. Once on a trip to the Riviera he thought of purchasing a villa "where Nice thrusts down her sun-drenched feet into the blue, blue sea," but he had finally decided against it. He thought of the unattached females of the Riviera as sophisticated, wily, and predacious. A crafty legion who knew the earmarks of the hunter. In New York there were thousands who were innocent of the tricks of dashing gallants. New York, in itself, possessed an atmosphere—a fat, stupid, healthy, old atmosphere which brought a feeling of security.

The manservant interrupted Grace's meditations. The fellow's face was white and drawn.

"Could I go away now, sir?" he

whined plaintively. "You see, sir, my wife is very ill."

Crandon Grace thought of the possible arrival of Mrs. Vanbard. If the storm slackened, he felt certain that the woman would bring the girl to his apartment so that he might identify her.

"I want you here!" he cried irritably. "Some one might call, and I do not wish to see any one."

"My wife is alone," pleaded the man.

"That is not my fault."

"No, sir, I know it isn't your fault. But we have no relatives in this country, sir. Yesterday, sir, I thought that—that I could get some one to nurse her but—but I am afraid they are not coming."

"Well, you must wait a little longer. What is wrong with your wife?"

The man stood fumbling with a button on his serving jacket. At last he spoke.

"The doctor says that—that she is dying of a broken heart," he stammered. "You know, sir. I told you at the time. It has made her—you understand. It happened when we lived here. She cannot forget and—"

The telephone rang, and the man retreated as Grace picked up the receiver.

"Hello!" he cried.

"Mr. Grace! Oh, Mr. Grace!" It was the voice now—the voice of the girl. "Mr. Grace, I called up to see if you have—if you have remembered? Have you? Have you thought of my—of my name?"

The voice, queerly pathetic, touched for an instant some near obliterated record in the mind of Grace. For just an instant the name itself seemed to wriggle out of the litter of dead days; then it slipped back.

"Speak again," he said, curiosity momentarily throttling his irritation. "I thought I recognized your voice. Speak about anything."

"Yes, yes, yes!" came the voice. "You see I am at Mrs. Vanbard's place

in The Drummond Apartments in Ninety-fifth Street. You remember, don't you? You were going to think, if you—if you could recall my name!"

The little lesion with the past was broken now. Grace knew it. Something that was connected with her first words—something that he could not define, had lured him to take a momentary interest in the discovery of her name. Now he wished to stop her, to forget about her. He became suddenly tired and disgusted with the incident.

The voice babbled on:

"I was going somewhere important! I am sure of that. If I saw you, I—I think I could remember! Mrs. Vanbard feels certain I could! She is trying to get a taxicab and—"

"Do not come here!" cried Grace. "I will not see you! I told the other woman I would not! Stay where you are now!"

The voice, the girl's voice, seemed to come from a tremendous distance. He heard it but faintly.

"I cannot hear you," came the whisper. "Did you ask where I am now? I am at Mrs. Vanbard's at The Drummond Apartments in Ninety-fifth Street. If you could come up—"

"No! No! No!" shouted Grace. "No: I do not wish to go up nor do I wish you to come here. Do you understand?"

He couldn't catch her words now. There was a faint, far-away whisper, fragmentary and indistinct. Some one else was on the line.

Crandon Grace, furious with himself, shouted at central.

"Some one is on the wire!" he screamed. "I cannot hear! Get off!"

"The Drummond Apart—" came the voice. "Ninety—close to Broadway. I do not—name."

There came silence, appalling silence. Crandon Grace rushed from his sitting room into the hall. The manservant

was sitting with his head in his hands, the picture of woe.

"What's up with this infernal telephone?" yelled Grace. "Ah, it's your fault! You didn't plug it properly! Fool!"

"Can I go?" whined the man. "Can I go? I must go!"

"Wait till I tell you!" shouted Grace. "Wait, you idiot!"

He dashed back to the sitting room and spoke hurriedly into the red-lipped mouthpiece.

"Hello!" he cried. "Hello! Hello! Listen! I do not want any one calling at my apartment and I do not wish to have anything further to do—"

The tired, steely voice of central broke in upon this tirade:

"Number, please."

Grace hurled the receiver at its hook, sprang up, and rushed to the hall. The servant was not there. Grace called him by name, but he got no answer. The fellow had disobeyed orders and had gone to the sick wife.

The insane telephone called again, loudly insistently. Grace ignored it for half a minute, then snatched the receiver. It was the stronger voice that answered his irritable query.

"It's Mrs. Vanbard speaking," she began. "You told her, didn't you?"

"Told her what?" shouted Grace.

"Her name," answered the stronger voice.

Grace took a deep breath and immediately used it up in a drawn-out denial which sounded like the howl of a wolf.

"No; I did not!" he roared. "Are you insane? Why did you say that? What are you attempting? Why do you lie?"

The stronger voice carried a little note of surprise as it answered.

"I thought you must have told her because she fainted suddenly while standing at the telephone."

"Fainted?" repeated Grace. "What made her faint?"

"If you didn't tell her anything, I can only think it was caused by worry."

"Listen!" cried Grace. "Are you there?"

"Yes, I'm listening."

"I want to tell you," said Crandon Grace, and his voice was throaty with passion as he spoke, "that I want nothing further to do with you or the infernal female that you're using as a means to annoy me! This is final! I'm going to bed! You and she can go to the devil!"

The receiver went to its resting place with a crash. Grace rose and walked pompously to his bedroom. He was indignant, disgusted, furious. The rose mantle of romance which he fondly thought was continuously resting upon his shoulders had been snatched away by a pair of fools at the end of a wire. Luckily, he thought, he was saved from further interruption. Months before he had caused a soundproof door to be fitted to his bedroom. He closed this tightly. The fiendish Mrs. Vanbard and her nameless protégé could ring till they were tired.

Grace thought of the manservant as he undressed. The fellow had acted in an unbelievable manner in running away. He, Grace, thought of what he would say to the fellow on the following day. Possibly the man was presuming on his long service. It was hard to hold servants when they had fifteen years' service behind them.

He fell asleep and dreamed. Dreamed of bells—telephone bells, doorbells, church bells! An insane medley of bells. They were being rung by devils—she-devils dressed in black and wearing common-sense shoes. He remembered in his dreams that they were very much like a woman that had ridden in the same parlor car on a trip he made to Philadelphia. A rather inquisitive woman. She had questioned his companion. Awful impertinence.

He woke at dawn and crept across

the soft Bokharan rug to the baize-covered door. He opened it and listened. The telephone was silent, but the hall doorbell was ringing violently!

Grace listened, head on one side. It was surely the woman and the girl! He waited, breathing heavily.

The tormented bell cried for peace. The apartment buzzed with a thousand echoes. The listener pictured a tyrannical finger sitting relentlessly upon the ivory button.

Crandon Grace tied the girdle of his dressing gown with nervous fingers. He smoothed his hair and strode to the door. The racket was unbearable.

Grace flung open the door with a suddenness which startled the owner of the fat finger that was illtreating the push button. He took a step backward, cannoned against a uniformed colleague, then recovered himself.

"Mr. Grace?" he questioned.

"Yes," snapped Grace.

"Well, I'm Sergeant O'Brien from the station. Me and Policeman Pawley here have just come round to ask you about a girl who doesn't know her name. Pawley was here twice before, but he couldn't make you hear."

Grace swung round toward the door of the sitting room.

"Come in," he snapped. "I do not wish to discuss matters in the hall."

Sergeant O'Brien, as he followed, twisted his head and winked at Policeman Pawley. Pawley grinned. The sergeant poked a fat thumb at the silk dressing gown which sailed along in front of him; Pawley, wise policeman that he was, showed signs of hysteria.

Grace wheeled and confronted the sergeant.

"Now what do you want to see me about?" he asked.

The sergeant was, to use his own words, "a little sot back." It was quite evident that Mr. Grace didn't find him a welcome visitor.

"Well, it's this way," he began,

"There's a lady uptown that's married to Mr. Vanbard. You know him, don't you? Old Tommy Vanbard who has bags o' coin and——"

"I don't know him," snapped Grace. "His bags of coin don't concern me."

Sergeant O'Brien gasped. His little eyes were fixed upon Grace. He twirled his cap nervously.

"Well, it's all right if you don't know him," he went on. "I suppose one don't know everybody, because if they did Pawley and I wouldn't be trampin' round in the snow to see if any one knew the girl that's up in old Tommy Vanbard's house. An' that's my business here this blessed an' holy morning. It's a girl, sir, that's slipped on the ice an' forget her name. Mrs. Vanbard phoned the station about one o'clock an' says to see you because all the possession the girl has on her is a bunch o' love letters with your name on them. Now you know as much as myself."

The little eyes of Sergeant O'Brien became hard pin points. He rocked himself backward and forward on his broad toes. He felt certain that he had the approval of Policeman Pawley for what the sergeant termed, "throwin' the slush full in his face."

Grace wet his lips and spoke in cold, icy tones.

"Mrs. Vanbard called me up last evening and spoke to me about this matter. I told her that I didn't know the girl and that I didn't wish to be bothered. That is all I have to say to you now."

"But, man!" cried the surprised sergeant. "The girl has a bunch o' letters written by you!"

"That has nothing to do with the incident," retorted Grace. "That is a private matter. Possibly they were not written to her. She might have stolen them. But, anyhow, I'm not interested. Is there anything else you want?"

Sergeant O'Brien, speaking later at the station, remarked that when Grace stated his attitude that he, O'Brien, could have been knocked over by a belt from a leprechaun's cap. "An' a leprechaun's cap, so me mother told me," he added, "is only a dried gooseberry skin with a sunbeam stuck in it as a decoration." As a matter of fact, he acted in a manner which made Policeman Pawley, who had an extraordinary reverence for the sergeant's sang-froid, think that his superior officer was on the verge of apoplexy.

"An'—an' you don't want to try an' help the poor little girl to find out who she is?" gasped the sergeant.

"I have told you what I intend to do," snapped Grace. "I do not wish to be troubled any further in the matter."

"But no one knows her!" cried the sergeant. "Man, we've got to find out where she lives! Sure she might have an old mother or a father, an' they not knowin'—"

Sergeant O'Brien's little denunciation was interrupted at this point by a voice which came from the hallway. A queer, strained voice.

"They know," came the voice. "Her father and her mother know."

Sergeant O'Brien wheeled and stared at the person who had slipped in quietly through the open hall door. He was a sallow-faced man with sorrow in his eyes.

"I'm the servant to Mr. Grace," he said, meeting the sergeant's interrogating eyes. "I've got something—something to say to him."

"But this girl that's lost her name!" cried the sergeant. "You said that her mother an' her father know. Who is she?"

"Just my little girl," said the man quietly, and he stepped softly around Policeman Pawley as he spoke. "I—I listened in on the telephone because I thought I recognized her voice when

she first called up. You see, she ran away from home two years ago and we—and we didn't know why. She is home now, home with her mother. I went up to Mrs. Vanbard's after I left here. Now I've—I've come back."

Crandon Grace had backed against the big, embroidered chair which had once belonged to the distinguished poisoner, Thomas Griffiths Wainwright. The servant was moving toward him with queer, stealthy movements. The sergeant looked from master to man; then spoke to the latter.

"There's a law in New York about weapons," he said. "I'm after wonderin' if you know."

The man half turned and showed two clenched fists.

"I have only these," he said quietly. "Only these."

Sergeant O'Brien glanced at a picture on the wall, a strange, sinister picture. His eye caught a little statuette, strayed for an instant along a frieze of dancing satyrs, then alighted upon the honest face of Policeman Pawley.

"We'll be getting back, Pawley," he said. "Come on. They'll be wondering what has happened to us."

As Policeman Pawley followed his superior through the door of the sitting room, the sergeant turned and whispered in the ear of his companion:

"Pull the door to an' give the key a turn," he said grimly. Then as the smiling Pawley, after obeying the order, overtook his superior the sergeant added: "You know, Pawley, that fellow is a bit too pretty. Did you see the peacocks embroidered on that dress that he was wearing?"

"Did I?" cried Pawley. "Did I?" Then, glancing admiringly at his sergeant, he added: "Faith, Dan, it's a cool, calm way that you've got with the big bugs. He didn't faze you a bit."

Sergeant Daniel O'Brien smiled softly. He loved a little flattery at times.



The House of Gold

By
John Seymour Wood

A GROUP of people sat on the Hamilton terrace one March evening, after a dinner at Government House, idly observing the graceful and somewhat overheated young dancers emerging from the ballroom into the moonlit coolness of the grassy plateau on which the red-coated regimental band was playing. The clear, warm Bermuda night was balmy with the scent of jasmine and oleander. The ball gave promise of being the gayest of the season; charming young peacocks, in delicately tinted evening cloaks, were arriving in shoals, and crowds of commonalty, enjoying the music, rimmed the roadway.

Yet there was, what was often sensed in Bermuda, a feeling of witchery in the air as if Ariel were still aloft, and, in his hidden cave, still dwelt Caliban, the earth spirit, his opposite and foil.

"The Bermudas," says an ancient historian, "have ever been accounted as an enchanted pile of rock and a desert habitation of hidden devils." Twice within a few months, the "white ghost" had been seen prowling in Paget, and queer lights had been noticed, in the early morning hours, in the windows of the famous Old Yellow House. A demented negro voodoo woman declared the place was "ha'nted" by the spirit of Stallwind, a gambler, who lived there with his bride a dozen years ago, and was murdered there—justly.

A distinguished-looking Englishman, who had arrived the day before

on his yacht, joined the party on the terrace. He had been the chief guest at the governor's dinner that evening, and was on his way, it was rumored, with an expedition to the south pole—perhaps as an antidote for years spent in the tropic jungles of Africa. He was bearded like a pard, dark and swarthy from the African sun, and rich beyond the usual dreams of avarice, by reason of his recent succession to an earldom.

A wit had dubbed him an African lion seeking to masquerade as a polar bear. In truth, he had been the text for talk throughout the long dinner at Government House—unmarried, therefore to be caught! As he joined the group on the terrace, Lady Grow, the governor's wife, of ample bosom, and, as she fancied, girlish waist, had seized the occasion to sentimentalize over the picture of young Romance before them.

"So many young people *begin* in Bermuda, you know," she informed them.

Culmstone stood for a moment, leaning on his cane, listening with a bored air to middle age expatiating upon its favorite themes—Youth and Love—two gorgeous flowers that never fade.

A young American girl, Miss Ferrer, remarked in a low tone:

"The elderly won't tolerate unhappy endings. In spite of experience, true love 'endureth forever.' 'And so they were married' means—endless happiness."

Madame Chatard, the famous French actress, reclining on the silken cushions of a deep willow chair next to her, smiled sardonically.

"So old-fashioned," she murmured. She was the image of a woman of the world who realizes that love is a phase, and a small part of life. Her accent was delicious, and her pale, dark-haired beauty had gained her repute quite outside of her profession. Although it was said to be her first visit she had little to say in approval of Ariel's Island. She called the abrupt changes of climate atrocious—a combination of fogs and piercing sunlight.

"Your ideas of the permanency of love, Lady Grow"—she flashed a glance at the governor's broad back—"are doubtless derived from your own happy experience."

"Love does not consist of mere happiness, Madame Chatard"—Lady Grow nodded her head insistently—"love is a duty. One of the great duties of life."

"Of course, love is a lasting duty for every man—quite as much as ridding Africa of lions, or finding out where the south pole ought to be. In Boston, we never do anything we like unless we first feel it to be a duty," said Miss Ferrier, smoothing out her long gloves.

"Your Anglo-Saxon sense of duty often covers a multitude of sins," laughed the actress. "I never could bring myself to do anything from a sense of duty."

"Everybody knows that constancy is played out these days. It's not the modern way," declared Miss Ferrier. "It used to be the chief fad of the old heroine of melodrama, but we've changed all that. Now, the difficult thing is to acquire the art of falling out of love gracefully, and with the approval of every one. Love is a kitten, playful, full of cunning ways—until it turns into a married cat and claws you!"

"American flippancy!" Sir Robert exclaimed, turning to Miss Ferrier soberly. "It's because the American woman's fads and her whims are too often tolerated."

"It's shocking to think how little a sense of duty characterizes married women in the States," added Lady Grow.

"American common sense!" protested Madame Chatard. "The need for constancy has been a terrible burden laid on a woman's back. When love has run its course, why drag it back and insist upon it?"

"I admit our literature at home demands the happy ending and the happy ending implies everlasting constancy," said Miss Ferrier. "I would no more let my lovers swerve from the narrow path than I would take liberties with my Sacred Codfish."

The English stared at her, mystified at the allusion to the emblem of her State. Lord Culmstone murmured something about lovers marrying being like lions' cubs growing into man eaters. "But really," he added, "I wish you would explain your Sacred Codfish."

"Another American institution," laughed Sir Robert. "We used to fight over our fisheries, but that's all gone by, now."

"So have love, duty, and constancy—gone by in America," said Lady Grow, pronouncing judgment. "No wonder their divorce courts are so busy!"

"Never heard of in England," drawled Colonel Clayton, the commandant of the English forces, who was sitting with his wife at a little distance. "If I may join the discussion, I'd say that marriage is a divine institution in which a wife alone should be allowed to rule"—he looked up to heaven, piously—"and it's my creed that lovers, however lightly they begin their performances, must go on to the end just

as affectionate and devoted as when they began. It's the broad, level high-road with a very plain tomb at the end of it. No swerving, no dallying, no hesitation." He leaned over and kissed his wife as she tried to push him away.

A sudden exclamation from Lady Grow, who had been peering through her lorgnette across the bay, interrupted the laughter.

"There are lights in the Old Yellow House," she cried. "They fly from window to window. Who can it be?"

Every one stood up instantly. They could see the shadowy outlines of the old mansion above the cedars, in the tropical moonlight, though it was across the water, half a mile away.

"No one has been in charge there since Hannibal, the caretaker, died," said Sir Robert. "Father Prudeau may be over there, but what would he be doing at this time of night?"

"It is odd—first one window, then another. Is it signaling?" asked Colonel Clayton.

"It—you don't mean you think——"

"Really, Lydia, I never heard of a bally black ghost."

"I once knew of a ghost who was a bright pea green," interposed Miss Ferrier. "I don't think you can draw any spiritual color line!"

"There's your plot," beamed Sir Robert, turning to the American girl. "A beautiful young bride accused of killing her wicked husband—all on account of a middy—a most deplorable affair in respectable Bermuda."

"I knew the lady," said Colonel Clayton quietly. "She was adorable—not deplorable."

"Of course, she was absolutely innocent. I've heard the story, and there's the house now, trying to tell a new version. It's the old gambler, signaling." Miss Ferrier appeared excited.

Mrs. Clayton, elegantly gowned, joined the group—a thin, hatchet-faced

woman with angular shoulders and sharp elbows.

"Mrs. Stallwind conferred a great benefit on Bermuda," she said. "Her story has always provided an endless fund of conversation. And now the old house acts as if it were trying to throw new light on the mystery."

"Ghosts!" cried Lady Grow. "Ghosts of the wicked past! I'm going into the ballroom to watch the dancing. Some say Stallwind was a suicide—others that he was shot by Midshipman Fenworthy; still others say a Cuban gambler killed him. I always believed Mrs. Stallwind innocent. We must be just to that poor girl, Lydia." She spoke emphatically, turning to Mrs. Clayton as the lights in the windows faded into darkness.

"I can't be just to a murderess, however beautiful—except to wish to see her decently hanged," snapped Mrs. Clayton vindictively.

Madame Chatard moved away from the terrace and stood gazing across the water as she leaned against the high balustrade. Lord Culmstone joined her, and they both stood silently watching for the lights to reappear.

"*Pauvre chevalier d'industrie*—peace to his soul," murmured madame. "Death is such a lasting penalty. He might have been left to his fate. I am told he was excessively clean and had beautiful, slender hands. In some ways, then, he was a gentleman."

"According to the tale I've heard, it was a case of a daughter of the gods and a son of Belial. She did right to kill him."

"In the story I've heard, Fenworthy acted very rashly."

Miss Ferrier, looking in their direction, whispered to Colonel Clayton:

"A very distinguished couple, perhaps, if they are not too old!"

Lord Culmstone calmly lit a cigar.

The emphatic Mrs. Clayton, turning

to Miss Ferrier, declared that the heated ballroom was not for her.

"It's so lovely out here to-night, and those lights in the Old Yellow House have set me back ten years. Don't you want to hear the true story? I'll tell it to you!"

Lady Grow resumed her seat to correct Lydia, if Lydia went too far.

"To begin with—the motive," said Mrs. Clayton. "Madame Yvonne was anxious to be rid of her husband, although people of her sort are not usually so scrupulous about being off with the old love before they are on with the new."

"Don't be too severe, Lydia. Madame Chatard will hardly enjoy hearing a countrywoman of hers condemned to the gallows!"

"I don't want to miss one word," begged Miss Ferrier. "You may be a State's witness, but you were here at the time. How romantic to sit here on the terrace with all its gayety and life about us, and look across the water at a poor ghost waving a lantern out of a window! Oh, do go on, Mrs. Clayton!"

"No girl ever landed on our dingy Hamilton wharf," proceeded the colonel's wife, with energy, "more radiant, more lovely in every way than young Yvonne Gerard—I admit that. She was already a bride, for only three hours before, she had been married to her elderly husband, John Stallwind. A most opportune marriage. Her steamer had sailed from Halifax, and mademoiselle came straight from a strict convent in Quebec. Mr. Stallwind 'hailed' from the Western States. Nothing was ever definitely known about him, except that he had money, and money talks well enough in Bermuda.

"The young beauty, with her light, fluffy hair and dark eyes, was the captain's ward—penniless—and undoubtedly he thought it would be a good trick

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to get her off his hands by a marriage, as soon as possible. They had a rough passage, and mademoiselle was the only lady to keep her seat at the captain's table. She charmed the Westerner by her gayety and good spirits. She had escaped from her convent, and coming to Bermuda to teach French in a dreary boarding school was a joyous event for her. But, instead of landing as a poor, ill-paid governess with no position, she arrived here a married woman with a fixed position. To my mind the girl ought to have been very grateful."

"Oh, bally grateful!" laughed the colonel. "At having married that old scoundrel!"

"Don't forget, Lydia," suggested Lady Grow. "The true story was that Yvonne was absolutely *forced* to marry Mr. Stallwind at the captain's command. She was in tears at her wedding, which was very significant. Yes, in tears at her wedding. And it was not on the high seas at all—but at the consulate and by Father Prudeau of St. Monica's."

"I wish, milady, you would let me tell my story in my own way! I don't believe Yvonne was in tears at her wedding, unless they were crocodile tears of happiness and relief. He was a very decent-looking man—and always dressed remarkably well."

"Stallwind—I've seen him many a time. He always wore clean white duck, white hat, shoes, tie, and all," said Colonel Clayton. "'Whited sepulcher,' we used to call him. He looked like a parson on vacation—and was all kinds of an old crook. Why, he was wanted for murder in St. Louis!"

"You're not sure that one word of that is true," returned his wife impatiently. "Lady Grow knows very well that Yvonne proved to be a frivolous, flirtatious, society-loving creature, in spite of her convent training. And she was idolized by the silly men! Her husband behaved very well—was

overindulgent, in fact. She spent his money freely—she almost bought out the Queen Street shops. She set all the dressmakers at work making dazzling ball dresses, and sports clothes. They say she planned a career in Paris.

"Then, one day, without any previous intimation, he presented her with the keys of the Old Yellow House across the bay. Those extravagant decorations and period furnishings were the beginning of the breach between the doting husband and his too-lively young wife. They laid out a splendid ballroom, for Bermuda, and quite elaborate gardens. He brought over statuary from somewhere in the States, and to please his wife, they say, he planned that gilded boudoir which still looks out, through its low French windows, on one of the loveliest sea pictures in the tropics."

"Of course, it's well known now why he built those bizarre salons," interpolated Lady Grow. "She was deceived into thinking it was for her benefit, poor child!"

"After a year of refurbishing," continued Mrs. Clayton, with a gesture of impatience, "came their grand ball and housewarming. All Bermuda was agog to see that astonishing new ballroom with its glittering chandeliers, its Empire furniture, its all-pervading splendor. Bermuda sat up! It was over there, in that house, on that first dazzling night, I met my colonel—he was captain then."

"How well I recall it! A night just like this when I, poor devilfish, was caught," sighed her husband pathetically. His wife ignored him.

"We embarked," she went on vivaciously, "with a barge party of jolly people, in a real Venetian gondola, lit with red lanterns, and were ferried across the bay by real, imported gondoliers. The lawn before the old house flamed with red fire. The regimental band was playing the new rags of the

day. My feet danced before we touched the shore.

"The great rooms were really gorgeous with their display of tropical flowers. It surprised me to learn that one smaller, gilded salon was devoted to roulette and rouge et noir. People said that the decorations reminded them of the casino in Homburg. Being young and wild about dancing, I hardly gave the matter a thought. As we entered servants in red plush and gold lace took our wraps. Bermuda had never seen anything so swagger, even in Government House. How well I remember Hannibal, seven feet tall, with his white wand—an enormous West Indian or, as some said, once a Brazilian bull-fighter. Our hostess was a perfect vision in her white-satin ball gown with its old lace, and her diamonds. She was graciousness itself, but I've never forgiven her for turning her back on me to greet a mere midshipman.

"I can't recall all that I saw and did—except that I wondered at Mrs. Stallwind's reciting Racine from an improvised stage—stopping the dancing for 'the performance—so egotistical! But aside from those dreadful recitations, I never have enjoyed myself so much at a ball. I remember Captain Clayton pressing on me delicious *pâté de foie gras* sandwiches and champagne, as the cathedral bells across the water in Hamilton struck four."

"My knell!" murmured the colonel, with an expression of mock despair.

"As I look back now I see a picture of wild gayety—pretty girls and brass-bound officers, with Yvonne and her midshipman in a full blaze of glory. Bermuda balls have always seemed as dull as a Scotch Sunday since that night in which we dubbed the Yellow House, the 'House of Gold.'"

"I'm damned glad that the poor girl had one night of triumph!" interpolated the burly Sir Robert.

"As we floated homeward in the gon-

dola, just at sunrise, some one asked, 'Did you see Mr. Stallwind walking to and fro on the terrace in his white clothes, looking in pathetically, now and then, through the low windows at his wife dancing in the arms of that handsome Midshipman Fenworthy?' 'Every one noticed it,' I replied. 'They were together all the evening, and I am sure I saw him kiss her twice. They were in the conservatory, half hidden in the hibiscus and oleanders.'

"Lydia, you said then what you knew was not true," said Lady Grow rebukingly.

"Oh, please do not interrupt," urged Madame Chatard. "Tell us every canard—tell us more, my dear Madame Clayton, for June and December never mated, it seems to me, more fantastically—from all I can hear."

"Did she not know that the house was a mere gambling hell and that she was to be its lure and its decoy? Of course she did!" continued Mrs. Clayton. "We speculated on what would be the outcome."

"Why," insisted Lady Grow, "she was just out of a convent and the excitement took her off her feet. I've seen girls at their first balls!"

"So have I!" lamented the colonel.

"And only a month later she killed him!"

"How can you say such things, Lydia!"

"It does seem like the old triangle," declared her husband, coming to her relief. "Pretty young wife, handsome middy, wicked old husband—a triangle as ancient as the Christian religion. I wonder what they did in Solomon's time—must have had polygons! But seriously, Lyddy, one can't say who killed him. He was dead and buried, that's certain, for Hannibal so testified at the inquest. My bet is that Fenworthy knocked him out, and he deserved it."

"Bluechester, here, can tell you better than any one else," said Sir Rob-

ert, as a stalwart naval officer in full uniform came up the stone steps at that moment.

"We're discussing the Stallwind case, Blue. Tell us what you know about it. Your ship was in here when it all happened."

"Ah, that lovely girl!" exclaimed Captain Bluechester, looking up to heaven. "She is no more. I made inquiries in Cuba. I heard a rumor that she died of yellow fever which she caught while working among the poor in the Santiago hospital."

"I am indeed sorry to hear that," said Lady Grow. "Let me present you, captain, to Madame Chatard, who is in Bermuda for the first time, and to Miss Ferrier, who is among us taking notes. Both are greatly interested in the mystery of the Golden House—especially as it was lit up this evening."

The captain bowed.

"You say lit up? How? Why? The house is empty as a barn. Dear me! At the time o' the Stallwind murder I was here on the *Valiant*. In his day it was well lit up! By George! I lost a bally pot of money in the old place! Yes, I was there on the night of the murder, as they call it, but really I don't know that I can give you much information."

"This is getting exciting!" cried Miss Ferrier eagerly. "Do give us your version, captain!"

The bluff, sunburned sailor, a guest at Government House, still on the disabled list from a wound received in the war, cleared his throat.

"I have no version of that affair, and I don't wish to be quoted. I knew them well. Walter Fenworthy was a handsome, clean-shaven young dog on his first voyage. He did good work aboard ship, and never put on any side on account of family, though he stood in remote line of succession for an earldom. As for Stallwind, the gambler known as the Whited Sepulcher, my

principal acquaintance with him was across his roulette table where he steadily raked in my month's pay."

"And you knew the wicked Yvonne? What was she like to you, captain?" asked Miss Ferrier.

"A princess! The first time I saw her she was going up the steps of St. Monica's chapel for vespers, followed by her little negro page in his Oriental turban and red-and-gold livery, with his curious, turned-up, yellow shoes. He carried her prayer book. She was the picture of a young saint—her eyes downcast, dressed in quiet gray. She was a lady, and we never understood why she had married Stallwind. Walter was waiting for her at the lich gate of St. Monica's, and as they walked home together, along the coral road, I remember a number of the natives followed them as if they were a circus. The little attendant was one of her many amusing whimseys.

"We all pitied the young beauty, married to that old gambler, posing before the public as a respectable, retired banker! She was high class—and he knew it. I attended the opening ball in the House of Gold where they said Walter and she first made vows together in the full of the moon. I never believed it. She was too devout a Catholic to wish to break the laws of the church, though she never appeared to be at all afraid of her husband. She was just out of a convent, but you know youth favors youth! Fenworthy could talk French like a native. He was educated at Geneva. Old Stallwind never could tell what they were saying to each other."

"*Pauvre enfant!* One cannot blame this young innocent for preferring to talk in a polite language," said Madame Chatard without a smile.

"In a tongue her husband was too impolite to comprehend," laughed Colonel Clayton.

"She was sly," sneered his wife.

"Ah, well, the old gambling palace was certainly a bit fascinating in those days, behind its high, yellow walls. I spent many an hour there and I won't say how many quarters' pay. Every afternoon they gave a musical tea. Everybody was there—Americans a specialty. They had the best rag band on the island and lots of dancing. Yes, lovely Yvonne was the cynosure—the center of everything."

"Vulgarly, decoy duck!" said Mrs. Clayton.

"I shall never forget the gorgeous sunsets from the terrace or the recitations by the lovely young hostess. They said she would make a great actress. She seemed to be floating along in a fanciful dream of success and happiness, with her first real life interest growing in her heart. Fenworthy appalled us older officers sometimes, by his attentions, while her husband in his white hat and clothes sat off on one side under the great poinciana, glowering through his narrow slits of eyes over a black cigar—he glowered, too, at the men who kept away from his roulette and faro bank.

"I always thought Yvonne was so innocent, so guileless, that she was entirely unaware of the nature of the place. Her husband told her that gambling was the occupation of all gentlemen, and taught her to bet, as he said, 'like a lady.' I remember one day there was a wager that madame couldn't swim across the bay and back. She did it! I backed her and won a fifty-pound note. She was a great swimmer—so was Walter. One moonlight night they swam out very far in the bay—there was some sort of a match—and we were considerably troubled lest the tide should carry them out to sea. Stallwind put out in a boat with Hannibal, but the young swimmers returned safely, looking as if they had arrived from another world. Perhaps they had visited Neptune's cavern beneath the

sea. Her eyes were like stars, full of a strange, passionate light."

"I fancy you were more than half seas over yourself, captain," Mrs. Clayton smiled.

"Yes, yes—a bit jealous, perhaps. I was young then—I call forty-five young, don't you, Mrs. Clayton? Fact was, she was so girlish, I felt like a father to her. I warned Fenworthy, but he only shrugged his shoulders, and very soon there came the 'shut down,' as they called it. They say that her husband found a note from Fenworthy a little less platonic than he thought the climate warranted. Her French maid translated it and made it out worse than it was.

"Stallwind had been peevish for some time, and now he rose up in his wrath, closed his iron gates, and made his wife a prisoner in the house. No more afternoon teas, no more dances, no more roulette. All Hamilton was astonished. The great house became, as you might say, a golden cage containing a beautiful bird who was to be kept for the sole delectation of its owner. Visitors had their cards politely returned by Hannibal, who was omnipresent, and always discreet. In fact, the negro was educated far above his station.

"The ogre was accused of all manner of atrocities. The lying French maid, out on some errand, told of her young mistress, chained in her white-and-gold suite, and of light steel bars at the windows. Naturally, her tale had the effect of arousing Fenworthy, and a number of our other junior officers, to fever heat. On a dark, stormy night, without the captain's permission—while he 'wore a patch on his left eye,' as we say in the navy—a boatload of braves set off from the *Valiant* at midnight, determined to rescue the imprisoned princess from the wicked ogre. I was fool enough to go along. What would be done with the princess when rescued was not apparent!

"My word, it was an awful night!" he exclaimed, lighting a fresh cigar. "We could see the lights in the windows of Yvonne's chamber, between the sheets of rain. Indeed, the whole house seemed to be lit up. We passed a large steam yacht at anchor near the dock, where a guard was stationed. He ordered us off.

"'We are revenue officers!' Fenworthy shouted in brave tones, standing up in the boat. 'And we've come to arrest John Stallwind for high crimes and misdemeanors. Tell him, also, he is wanted in the United States as a renegade from justice.'

"The guard replied by firing a volley of musket shots over our heads. We soon made a landing, and the guard ran up to the house to give the alarm. We heard the baying of watchdogs and suddenly a white figure appeared—old Stallwind, himself—moving across the lights of the house. We all saw him. His revolver was in his hand. He aimed it in our direction and fired half a dozen times—the shots going wide of the mark. Fenworthy shouted:

"'Surrender! The jig is up! You're an old jailbird!' The old man rushed back into the house, waving his white arms madly as if in desperate fear, as Fenworthy, half jokingly, shouted again: 'Surrender in the name of the law!'

"Of course he had no warrant, but his words had the effect, as Americans say, of throwing the fear of God into the Whited Sepulcher, for rockets were sent up from the roof of the stables, signals to the mysterious steam yacht in the offing, and presently the front door burst open, and a great crowd of well-dressed people poured out in mad haste, as if fearing a government raid. Ladies in long cloaks, maids holding up umbrellas, valets and gentlemen in greatcoats. We found out afterward that the yacht belonged to a wealthy

Cuban planter who had brought over a great company of sporting people and gamblers from Havana. I thought I saw Madame Stallwind with a crowd of women, most of whom were screaming with fright, but I wasn't sure about it. They all hurried down to the dock and were carried off in the rain to their yacht by the waiting boats. We surrounded the mansion—we had a dozen in our party altogether—and Fenworthy hammered at the door with the butt of his pistol.

"Open in the name of the law!" he shouted. We heard pistol shots within the house, and then all was silent."

"There!" cried Mrs. Clayton breathlessly. "That was the time she shot him!"

"Who knows? After a little trouble we broke through the door, but found no one behind it. We crept cautiously along the hallway, up the staircase to the level of the ballroom. Everything betokened a mad flight—gilt chairs were overturned, the roulette wheel had been carried off, the silken curtains had been pulled down. Only one light was lit in the chandelier, and there wasn't a soul about. The whole house seemed deserted.

"We've driven out the mice!" cried Fenworthy. "Now we must catch the old rat—and save the poor girl he has imprisoned in the room above." The middy, flourishing his revolver, rushed upstairs. We hurried after him into madame's boudoir, where her splendid, canopied bed, with its painted Cupids and brocade hangings, was in terrible disorder. It looked almost as if a hurricane had struck the house. Laces, gowns, and jewelry were scattered over the thick, velvet carpet. The door of a dressing room adjoining the boudoir was closed and locked. We broke into the room and there, lying on the floor, lay old John Stallwind, fully dressed in his neat, white duck, his white hat pulled over his face.

"My God, Fenworthy! The old gambler is dead!" I cried, aghast. "There's a red stain above his heart."

"Fenworthy stood up and shouted: 'Yvonne! Yvonne! Where are you? Stallwind is dead!' But only the echoes of his words rang through the great house. Even the negro servants, fearing arrest, had fled. Fenworthy ran here and there, opening doors, hunting for the girl he loved. At last he returned, crestfallen.

"She is nowhere to be found!" he cried. "My poor Yvonne! And as for Stallwind, it is evident he has killed himself."

"But where is his revolver?" asked one of the young officers.

"To tell the truth," said Fenworthy, in a lower tone, "when I first broke in I saw a white apparition down the dark hallway and I fired several shots. Is it possible that I may have killed the poor wretch myself?"

"If you did," I answered, "for God's sake, don't admit it!"

"He shot at us! Besides, it's always right to shoot a rat!" declared Fenworthy.

"Looked at in one way," I said, "you've broken into a man's house without a warrant, and shot him. The law will go hard with you, my boy. Admit nothing."

"Somebody shot the poor brute. My God! It couldn't have been—"

"It was!" exclaimed Mrs. Clayton, "It wasn't suicide. As you say, no revolver was found near him. She killed him and ran off."

"We searched through the house from garret to cellar," the captain continued, ignoring the interruption. "We must have spent an hour searching the house and grounds, but we found no one, and when we returned to where the old gambler lay dead, there was Hannibal, in his red livery, kneeling at his side, groaning and rocking with woe. How did he get there? No one

had seen him—perhaps the negro killed his master.

"According to the law of the island," he moaned, "a body must be buried within twelve hours. Ah'll dig the grave to-night. You see, sir, where the bullet killed him, my poor master! He was good and kind to me."

"Who killed him?" I asked.

"Ah dunno, sir, Ah was out of the house. He sent me on an errand—him and missis had an awful quarrel. Ah s'pose Mis' Yvonne did for him, but Ah never seen her do it."

"That's the answer Hannibal has always given," said Mrs. Clayton.

"No, Mrs. Clayton. She was incapable of doing it. It's more probable that Fenworthy accidentally killed him in the hallway. We went back to the ship. Poor Fenworthy was in a state of collapse. His beautiful, caged bird had flown away under the dreadful suspicion of having murdered her jailer! I shall never forget that night. The midshipman was too broken up to pull himself together, so it fell to me to inform the Hamilton police, and I did the best I could to make it suicide.

"I went back to the house the next morning to quiz Hannibal, and found him placing Easter lilies on a new-made grave, just west of the second palm tree. He told us he had buried his master according to law and that, as madame had not returned, she was probably with the gamblers, on board their yacht on the way to Cuba. Fenworthy was court-martialed, but he got off with a light sentence of a year in the naval jail at Portsmouth."

"Of course the lovers have been together ever since—somewhere on land or sea," sighed Lady Grow.

"No, they are wide apart as the antipodes," declared Miss Ferrier, "and wherever they are, the curse of murder hangs over them and will keep them apart forever."

"And the odd thing about it all," said

Colonel Clayton, as he lit a fresh cigar, "is that the house is still a mystery. Those mystic lights to-night—it still harbors some strange enigma."

"I'm dying to solve it!" exclaimed Miss Ferrier. "Let's go over there to-night and explore the house. Let's exorcise the ghost. We must be body-guarded by a force of soldiers and sailors, with Sir Robert leading. I can't let the enigma remain unsolved another night."

Madame Chatard, who had not spoken for some time, and who seemed absorbed in the tales of the old house, declared that she was extremely tired and would be obliged to forgo the pleasure of visiting the romantic old place that night.

"It would be a splendid adventure to go over there now and beard the old ghost in his den," urged Miss Ferrier.

"Not to-night," commanded Lady Grow. "I don't fear ghosts—I believe in them—but I have a very nervous disposition and can't stand excitement. There they go again!"

"Lights in the old house," mused Captain Bluechester. "By Jove! Looks as though the old chap was wigwagging, perhaps signaling for mortal help."

Sir Robert stood up, shading his eyes from the glare of the electric lights. "I think perhaps it would be better to visit the Yellow House to-morrow," he said, "but I believe I'll send the police over there at once. I'd like to find out what the devil is going on in the old place. I suspect negro thieves. There's another odd thing—it's just ten years ago to-day since the murder took place."

"I hardly think it's necessary to take the ladies over to-night," interrupted Lord Culmstone. "It must be very gruesome there in the light of the moon."

"But, oh, it's so enchanting!" exclaimed the pretty American. "It's the very ideal of romance. And if we

should see anything it would be ghastly and thrilling. We might see shadow pictures of long ago."

"Pictures of long ago!" murmured Madame Chatard. "My dear child, when you are older you will dread the histories of long ago." She summoned her maid and bade them all a stately good night.

The sun was half hidden in mist the next morning as the government barge, carrying a large party across the bay, approached the house of mystery which, from the water, appeared to be hiding behind its brick garden walls. Two great royal poincianas added to its sinister aspect with their dense shade. They landed and entered the garden through a broken-down side wall and found the old flower beds in a state of wild disarray. Drooping foliage of the tamarisk, a wild grape tree, and disordered but fragrant honeysuckle made a jungle of the cedar grove, while oleander and scarlet hibiscus overran the west end of the house in untrammelled profusion.

Above it all, tall palm trees peered over the wall like inquisitive giraffes. Below them, a winged Cupid, standing in the broken bowl of a Roman fountain—it might have come from the House of Pansa—gave evidence of more romantic days. The group of explorers, now recruited by a dozen or more curiosity seekers, stood about the grass awaiting the order of Sir Robert Grow, who was in command. He was planning to break through one of the French windows, with the help of several sailors.

The police, it seemed, reported that nothing of importance had occurred during the night. They had not entered the house, but had watched the windows from outside the gates.

In the light of day, the old house seemed more dingy than frightful. But, even in its dinginess and neglect, it

maintained a strange dignity, for it was hallowed by romance and mystery.

"It has decided atmosphere," remarked Miss Ferrier.

"I have a creepy feeling that we would all be better off on the other side of the bay," whispered Lady Grow.

"But it's so beautiful—it breathes the spirit of the past. They say those two great, folding doors of the portico have never been opened since the fatal night."

"I've wanted to go through the house for ten years," confessed Mrs. Clayton. "Yvonne's written confession may be pinned on her *toilette*. I wonder where Madame Chatard was this morning? We could not find her."

"And Lord Culmstone, too," added Lady Grow.

"We shall see corpses swaying in the wind, hanging from chandeliers; chests of gold, a pirate's nest! I do wish Lord Culmstone had come with us!" sighed Miss Ferrier.

There was a pause in Sir Robert's attack on the casement, as he turned to the waiting group and said:

"I think I hear footsteps coming down the staircase."

Captain Bluechester, seeing the agitation of the ladies, walked over to them like a stiff grenadier, with the intention of being soothing. He spoke quietly and pathetically of the charming young girl, the former mistress of the old house, who came into it as a lovely bride and went out of it under such a dreadful cloud.

"On this very turf," he said, "her little feet danced like *Mignon's*, and from this dilapidated balustrade yonder, I heard her recite Molière and Racine—classic French, which we British officers did not entirely comprehend! In that clear water below the dock she dove and swam with her midshipman—a charming, youthful pair of geese! How the pampas grass has overgrown the mangoes by the wall! She planted

it all. She was fond of her garden and the old place seems saturated still with her poetic spirit. Bah! She was never guilty of any crime. Will the old house ever explain itself?"

The captain had barely finished speaking, when Sir Robert put up his hand. The heavy, colonial doors at the back of the portico slowly opened. A venerable priest in cassock and biretta, his face pale and emaciated, held up two fingers of his right hand and came slowly out on the portico.

"Peace—*silentium!*" he murmured. "I come to announce to you a death. May he rest in peace." Many in the circle on the grass made the sign of the cross. "An old man who has lived many years in the hidden caverns beneath this house last night passed away in my arms. Dear friends, John Stallwind lived his last years here in hiding from the minions of the law. He was a renegade from justice. At different times, he had killed three men, in the Western States. Last night I heard his dying confession, and gave him absolution—and the last rites of the church."

Sir Robert Grow, aghast at this statement, could not remain silent.

"This is incredible, Father Prudeau," he exclaimed. "Stallwind alive! Why, his grave lies beneath yonder palm tree, marked with a headstone!"

"When, under the hand of God, Hannibal died a week ago," Father Prudeau continued calmly, "John Stallwind's only communication with the outside world ceased. He had been a self-interred prisoner, and he depended upon his servant for his daily food. Stallwind was dying of starvation when I, noticing the lights in the windows, entered the house by means of a key Hannibal had given me, and discovered him. He was signaling for succor, but he was too far gone to survive. Behold, dear friends, how this ancient mansion which has been so long ac-

cused, is thus proved guiltless of harboring the crime of murder. Stallwind died at midnight."

Lady Grow raised her stately head, advanced a step, then paused, as the old priest, whom every one revered as the head of St. Monica's, walked slowly out upon the lawn to meet her. Sir Robert, meanwhile, had entered the silent house.

"Hannibal carried out his master's plan," said the priest, "which was to place upon his young wife the stigma of his murder. In his jealous anger he knew that he could contrive no greater revenge. Hunted by the authorities for his own crimes in the United States, he made use of the vast underground caverns of this island. At night, accompanied by Hannibal as oarsman, he passed through the subterranean waters, miles inland. Sometimes he made his way to the earth's surface, where he was taken by the habitants for the apparition of a white ghost."

"It is true—it is all true!" cried Sir Robert, as he now came hurrying out of the house. "Old Stallwind is dead. He lies across the great bed in his wife's chamber. No trick this time! I've sent for the coroner. There's a secret staircase in the wall with a door standing open which leads down into a lighted cavern, hung with stalactites. The old man pretended to be dead in order to throw suspicion on his wife and her lover. Poor Yvonne—poor Walter! I wish we knew where they were! Lydia, she was innocent! I am glad you will never live to see her hanged!"

"So the old house is not guilty—no one was guilty!" exclaimed the brisk young American girl. "What an old wretch he was to keep himself in hiding in order to keep Yvonne and her midshipman apart! The news must be sent to them, wherever they may be. How delightful to have them united at last! Aren't you glad, Mrs. Clayton?"

"I think her conduct was decidedly

risqué—I might say, improper—even if she was not actually guilty of a crime,” replied that lady stiffly.

Father Prudeau gazed benignantly upon the group before him, all of whom had now drawn near.

“My dear friends,” murmured the thin old priest in French, and his words, though low, had the clarity of a silver bell, “the separation of Walter and Yvonne is ended; each believed the other guilty of the assassination of Stallwind. But no specter of a murdered man has held up his warning finger since midnight. That ghost is laid forever. Walter and Yvonne may come together without fear or reproach.”

“How I wish we knew where they were so that we might tell them!” exclaimed Lady Grow.

“Walter and Yvonne—come forth!” cried the priest in a loud voice, turning to the entrance.

A murmur of astonishment ran through the assemblage, followed by a sudden, paralyzing silence as Lord Culmstone led Madame Chatard by the hand out upon the portico.

“These two unhappy children”—the old priest smiled at them benignantly—“met again, after all these years, in the room where Stallwind now lies. They wanted to solve the mystery of the moving lights—but they wanted to solve it alone. So they slipped away in separate boats, in the early hours of the morning. They confronted each other, like ghosts of the past, at the bedside of the dead man. I found them there and told them what you already know.”

“I had a suspicion all the time!” cried Miss Ferrier, applauding. “Now we shall see a marriage!”

But after a dozen years Yvonne, the young bride, had become Madame Chatard, actress, who evidently had a keen feeling for the drama of the situation. She came forward, gracefully dropping Lord Culmstone's hand. She was clad

in deep mourning and put aside her veil from her face, which showed unusual pallor. She stood a moment, a beautiful figure, in the spot where once she had recited Molière and Racine.

“Mes amis, you behold here the ruins of a beautiful old house, and you see the decayed remnants of flowers in a dismantled garden. You are witnesses, also, of a romance that is dead. The man lying there in the old house has attained his vengeance. We shall go our ways.” There was a note of calm finality in the low-toned voice.

“Speak for yourself, Yvonne,” murmured Lord Culmstone.

“Time has aided the old plotter. We may not resurrect the antique atmosphere of feeling—yet, how these great trees remind me of those exciting days of love and fear, of danger and disaster! But they say to me, too, with a softened tone. ‘Dear child, you have passed beyond the playtime of youth, and the storms of young passion. The world has called you.’”

“Selfish to the last,” whispered Mrs. Clayton. “She's wedded *now* to her career on the stage. She doesn't care in the least how Walter feels!”

“And so, dear friends, I bid you adieu—for I shall leave Bermuda tonight. I may add that a large sum of money left to me by my husband I have given to Father Prudeau to found a hospital for the poor within these walls. The House of Gold shall live in the future as an abode of beneficence, goodness, and charity.”

“It is very, very sad,” observed Lady Grow, gently wiping her eyes.

“But how about you, Walter?” broke in Captain Bluecheester bluntly.

“It's very embarrassing for me, captain, to say anything after this solemn pronunciamiento, but in spite of the Zeitgeist that seems to have taken possession of Yvonne, I would like to ask you to wait until I return from my expedition for the end of the chapter!”



In Broadway Playhouses

By
Dorothy Parker

For Auld Lang Syne

IT looks pretty much as if some one had drawn the attention of the producers to a small item which has contributed no whit to the widely lamented slump in the theaters. Some little birdie must have whispered to them that much of the trouble with the season's plays could be directly traced to the plays themselves. The producers, in that stage of despair where any suggestion whatever seemed like a message from the angels, caught right on to the idea, and set valiantly out to jack up the drama. But you know yourself that these are no times to take chances. The thing to do is play safe. The clever lads followed up that line of thought, worked it out that what used to knock them cold in 1910 would again bowl them over in 1921, went out and dug up a lot of plays that had proved their success in the good old days, and there you are.

It was Mr. Belasco, the master mind, who started the thing off with his revivals of "The Easiest Way" and "The Return of Peter Grimm." The idea spread like hot cakes—oh, all right, then, like wildfire—and it seemed no time at all before revivals were tearing loose at a tremendous rate all over the place. During the course of one brief week no less than three ten-year-old plays were taken out of the tar-

paper bags, dusted off, and set proudly on display. And from what they do say of the number of others scheduled to appear, that will soon be looked back on as the week in which only three revivals were brought out.

It is just like old times again to read, in the electric lights, "The Chocolate Soldier," "Bought and Paid For," and "Alias Jimmy Valentine." It is like Old Home Week on Broadway.

Of these three, one proved to be every bit as good as the golden memories of it, and the other two, in so many words, didn't. So let's sit right down and have a nice long talk about the two that were not so good.

Mr. William A. Brady, having practically let himself run wild on "Marie Antoinette," only to have it close on him in a fortnight or so, told Art just what it could do, and brought back "Bought and Paid For," to see if that would hold them for a while. Doubly thrifty in the enterprise, he seized the opportunity to work into the revival a lot of scenery that had been banging about the house and getting in everybody's way. There was a sentimental pleasure in meeting again that setting from "Tarzan of the Apes" and the boudoir which belonged to *Marie Antoinette*. After all, old friends are best.

But that didn't go for the play. As I

recall "Bought and Paid For," it was one of the high spots of a lifetime. But, of course, there were extenuating circumstances. At the time of the original production I was in that exquisite flush of tender girlhood when anything that might possibly be dragged under the head of suggestiveness was hailed as great stuff. And the play, in those candle-lit times, was quaintly looked upon as pretty daring.

That scene at the end of the second act in which the inebriated husband smashes in the door of his wife's room—well, people said that they didn't know, they were sure, what the stage was coming to. The flapper of the period, with her instep-length skirt and her cascades of lace-edged jabot, had a hard time getting to see "Bought and Paid For." She had to establish an alibi beforehand. I remember, as if it were yesterday, giving it out to those at home that I was going over to Eleanor's house to master the shell stitch used in crocheting neckties. Ah, rosemary, rosemary—

Well, anyway, the revived "Bought and Paid For" turned out to be a creakingly mechanical affair, and the great door-smashing scene was about as daring as a bedtime story to those trained on "Getting Gertie's Garter" and its like. Perhaps the trouble is that there have since been so many plays of the "Bought and Paid For" model that the original seems but old stuff. And old stuff it certainly is.

Charles Richman is back in his former part, and Helen Mackellar is now the lady of the smashed door. They do what they can. Marie Nordstrom, of the original cast, does far more than she needs to with her rôle of the vulgar sister-in-law. Nothing in life can be worth all that effort. William Harrigan is now capably filling the rôle created by Frank Craven—the one part in the piece that bears reviving.

For at least these many years people

have been going about sighing, "Ah, if we could only have something like 'The Chocolate Soldier' once again. We don't see any musical comedies like that nowadays." Having now had opportunity to gaze long and attentively upon the revival of "The Chocolate Soldier," it becomes clear that the answer to the last part of their moan is, "No, thank Heaven!"

It is somewhat difficult to see where the thing ever got its reputation. Of course, there is Oscar Straus' music, but, if you promise not to let it go any farther, I should like to whisper that that isn't so exciting. "My Hero," though you applaud it dutifully for old sake's sake, and even hum some of the lower bits along with Miss Tessa Kosta to show your knowledge of music, is but a rather tiresome waltz, made pretentious by being played very slowly. The charming "Letter Song" does not occur until late in the third act, by which time your spirit is too broken to afford it much of a welcome. The lyrics include one number in which a large, strong woman repeatedly utters the words, or word, "Ti-ra-la-la." There is also a chorus built about the phrase "That would lovely be," and a song in which women's burden of suffering during wartime is summed up in the line, "Oh, this war makes me feel glum."

The comedy consists of a burlesque general with movable mustaches, a collection of subtle lines of the "I have a sore throat," "Well, I told you not to wash your neck" school, and the usual married man with the eye for the chorus ladies. There is, of course, a legend that the book is founded on Shaw's "Arms and the Man," and there is a statement in the program to that effect. But if you happen to overlook it, Shaw would be the last person that you would guess had had anything to do with it.

The piece is set with an impressive

disregard for expense, and the chorus is gayly dressed in more or less peasant costume. The large cast is headed by Tessa Kosta and by Donald Brian, who delivers his lines with an intonation startlingly like that used by Allan Pollock in his pathological rôle in "A Bill of Divorcement." Mr. Brian, in his singing, gets more closely in touch with the general scheme of the music than he was wont to do in the old days, but his dancing, though the heart bleeds at the admission, is not what it used to be. His performance in "The Chocolate Soldier" made one regret more poignantly than ever that he had not been engaged, for the part he once originated, in last September's revival of "The Merry Widow." For then he would have been out on the road with that company when "The Chocolate Soldier" was produced.

But the revived "Alias Jimmy Valentine"—now, that is distinctly something else again. It is as fresh and as entertaining as if it had been written only a few minutes ago. And it is practically impossible to see how the original cast could have been any better than this one, which includes Otto Kruger, Emmett Corrigan, Margalo Gillmore, Mary Boland, and—something these weary eyes have not heretofore rested upon—two amazingly realistic stage children; believe it or not, two in one company—played by Lorna Volaire and Andrew Loror, Jr. We have cherished an unrequited passion for Mr. Loror ever since he appeared as *Penrod*. I think it is that masterful way of his.

It is a matter of grave doubt whether you can get more amusement for your money at any other place in town than you can at the Gaiety Theater. I know it is an admission of advancing age when you start talking about the good old times, but even at that cost I cannot hold myself back from saying that the crook plays of these days are a

pretty listless lot when compared to the old thrillers. There is a rumor going what has been called the rounds that a revival of "Within the Law" may happen at any time now, and, indeed, it would be no surprise to those with even a superficial knowledge of the workings of the managerial mind if the success of "Alias Jimmy Valentine" spurred the revivalists on to bring back to the stage a whole rogues' gallery of once-popular crook plays. The producers are not the ones to put all their yeggs in one basket.

Well, that being irrevocably that as far as the month's revivals go, we might go on and scatter a little sunshine over the brand-new plays that have lately come to town. It is too late, unfortunately, to bring happiness to some of them, for they passed away before we could do anything in the line of smoothing their pillows or taking down their last words. In the midst of life we are in Cain's storehouse!

"Marie Antoinette" gave Miss Grace George what has become her annual opportunity to appear as the star in a failure. The authors hid their identity under the name of "Endymar," though the management hinted that they would ultimately reveal their right names to an astounded world. But, alas—when it was finally announced that Miss Margaret Mayo and Mr. Kennedy were the combined authors of "Marie Antoinette," people only looked blankly at one another and said, "What's 'Marie Antoinette?'" The play gave Miss George a chance to look charming in her eighteenth-century costumes, and Mr. Brady an occasion—to which he rose nobly—to spread himself upon the production. The authors provided *Marie Antoinette* with a personality about as dashing as that of the late Queen Victoria.

"The Fair Circassian," a little thing by Gladys Unger, departed after a week, but during that time it managed

to hang up a new record for low receipts at the Republic Theater. And certainly it deserved the honor. It was all about a Circassian slave girl who was brought to England as a gift by a Persian delegation and took up her abode with a coldly correct family named Ottery—if you thought it worth while, you might say that the piece perished of hardening of the Otteries, though I doubt if you would stoop to it. The play was laid somewhere around 1830, thus adding the curse of the costume play to its other handicaps.

"Everyday," the most recent Rachel Crothers creation, had a notable cast, including Tallulah Bankhead, Lucille Watson, Minnie Dupree, Frank Sheridan, and Henry Hull. It also had carefully followed the Crothers formula for a success. All the good people were flawless and the bad people were something terrible, and there was a great deal of talk about ideals, which the good ones valued far more than money. Indeed, their contempt of money was really spectacular. If only the author shared it!

Oddly enough, though, "Everyday" was not a success. In fact, on the contrary. There are times when one is proud to proclaim one's self a member of the great American theatergoers.

"The Mountain Man," the new Clare Kummer play, doesn't look as if it would be with us very long. It starts off as if it were going to be one of the best things you ever saw in your life, and you feel that you really must write to your congressman to get him to do something about putting through a bill to establish a day of national thanksgiving for Clare Kummer. But if you are a true Kummer enthusiast, you will get up and go quietly home as soon as the first act is over. Then you will never know how bad Miss Kummer can go on a play. It is curious how brilliant the author can be when she is talking about nothing in particular, and how

tedious when she begins to be concerned with a plot. And "The Mountain Man" has more plot than any Kummer play to date. So beyond saying that Sidney Blackmer is extremely good in the title rôle, it is better to speak no further of the piece, but to sit back and wait hopefully for the next Kummer comedy.

"The Dream Maker" brings back William Gillette in the dual rôle of author and star. From my window is visible a large electric sign, several bulbs of which cannot be induced to work, announcing "The Dream Maker," in great red letters, followed by more modest white ones that assert "More Thrilling Than 'The Bat.'" That seems, really, somewhat of an overstatement. Much as I hate to be dogmatic about the thing, I feel it only fair to say that "The Dream Maker" is not more thrilling than "The Bat." I might go farther and say that it is not as thrilling as "The Bat." In fact, I will say it.

There is a little mild and wholesome excitement along in the last act, where Mr. Gillette, as the feeble old doctor, outwits a gang of criminals, but it takes three long, long acts to reach that climax, and when you do reach it, you don't feel that the nervous strain will be more than you can bear. Mr. Gillette is, of course, enormously effective in his gentle way, and the rest of the cast is rather more than the conventional "adequate." It is a little difficult to advise those who plan to visit "The Dream Maker." If you arrive late, you won't know what anything is about, and if you are there all the way from the beginning, you won't care.

"The Varying Shore," the new Zoë Akins play, starts off with a prologue and ends with an epilogue which may be grouped together under the heading "As Bad As They Come." In between them, however, are three extremely interesting acts, showing the three turn-

ing points in the life of *Julie Venable*. The play goes directly backward; one sees the heroine first as a woman of forty, then in her late twenties, then as a girl of seventeen. It is written in the frequently flowery style that marked the author's "*Déclassée*;" there is the glamour and the romance about the heroine that Miss Akins loves so well to endow her with. The rôle is played by Elsie Ferguson, whose acting, oddly enough, goes backward along with the play. She is at her best in the first act, not quite so good as the young woman, and pretty far out of the way as the girl of seventeen. It is perfectly great to stress the flowerlike innocence of the girl, but it seems going a bit too far to make a little lily-white dumb-bell of her. But in spite of this, "*The Varying Shore*" is definitely something to see.

There is, of course, some suggestion of a play to "*Kiki*," in which Lenore Ulric is starring, but that is the last thing you think of. The first and only thing to dwell on is Miss Ulric's acting. She is, in a word, gorgeous. And it isn't as if everything humanly possible had not been done to make it hard

for her. She has been provided with a leading man, in the person of Sam Hardy, who stands up very straight, talks as fast as he can, and lets that go as acting. She is supported, if you could call it that, by a cast which, with the exception of Thomas Mitchell, overacts with a childlike enthusiasm. And she has been given a play which without her would be a bore.

It is one of those things about the little waif of the streets who comes into the home of the handsome man-about-town. According to the best usages, he harms not so much as a hair of her head, and grows finally to love her in a fine and manly way. I would be willing to bet at least one copy of David Belasco's "*The Return of Peter Grimm*," containing a handsome purple-satin bookmark, that in the original French version of "*Kiki*" things were rather different. However, in the interests of art, for which he has done so much, Mr. Belasco gets in some clean-up work, and *Kiki*, as we see her at the Belasco Theater, remains throughout "a good girl"—business of dropping head, lowering voice, and gulping several times piteously.



HEIGH-HO, ROMANCE!

PHILLIDA'S whimsical, lovely, and twenty—

Wistful her smile as a girl's in a ballad—
Sated a little with jewels and plenty,

Toying with life as she toys with her salad.

Heigh-ho, Romance!

Madelon, hurrying past with her Tony,

Shines in the rain like a red, dewy flower.

What though the future be meager and stony?

Hearts go a-singing and love has his hour.

Heigh-ho, Romance!

Phillida's husband is sixty and whining,

Piling up millions in ways that he shouldn't:

Ah, could she barter his dross for the shining

Flame that is Madelon's—Phillida wouldn't.

Heigh-ho, Romance!

JESSIE HENDERSON.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

THERE are those who contend that modern marriage, as compared with the more old-fashioned institution of former days, is not only a Godless and highly unconventional indulgence, but also almost unreservedly a flat failure. We hold no brief for either group. We've seen pleasant successes in each. But the fifty-fifty arrangement of the newer institution cannot but intrigue the imagination which projects easily its far-reaching results.

TWO young people had entered into such an arrangement. Julia Granis had thought that her art career could not but prosper better when warmed continually by the encouragement which Peter Chartrie could as her husband give. The thing presented itself to him similarly. And so they were married. But what came after neither of them had anticipated. Increasing success for Peter brought with it increasing indifference to the domestic arrangement which marriage had created. And Julia very soon found herself facing difficulties alone, and realized that she was inadequate to the test. Then the inevitable question: What was the right thing for her to do about it all? For to her alone did the thing present itself as really serious.

THE novelette which we have scheduled for the April issue is, we believe, one of the strongest tales we have published in a long time. It is stark realism of the most gripping sort. And it portrays an insight into the hearts of humans which no AINSLEE's author achieves better than Winston Bouvé. "Pan's Wife" marks the high spot of this brilliant young author's writing since she has become one of our regular contributors. Watch for it and, when you have read it, let us know what you think of it. We like to know when you like a thing and, as well, when you don't.

IN almost every town there is a so-called "wrong side of the track," and the town's best people—socially speaking—do not live there. In people's lives, too, there is a wrong side, and there are many influences at work—love particularly—which make them dwell for a while, at least, on that wrong side. Roger Clinton, the governor's son, had dwelt there for a short period during his youth. So had Nicholas Dalroy, apparently, for when he returned to his native town after several years away from it he found that he had a wife. And the situation made for complications, for he supposed himself engaged to Thora Wood. "The Right Side of the Track," by Alice Tildesley, in the April issue, is a remarkable tale of the effect of a man's past life on the lives of those with whom he is associated.

THESE, together with Margaret Pedler's great novel, "The Moon Out of Reach," are leading features of the April number. There are, besides, seven or eight shorter tales which rank well with them and complete a highly entertaining number.

FROM the enthusiastic response which work of Josephine Meyer's has always brought from AINSLEE's readers, we know that they will read with regret that she passed away on January second. She had had, in spite of her youth, an unusually fruitful career. Her great zest for life, together with her marked ability in numerous fields, made possible early the success which comes to most writers only after years of toil and of disappointment. And she drowsed off beautifully into her last sleep after asking, characteristically, for her writing materials, so that she might be going on with work which, even during her illness, she was constantly planning and thinking out. She had sent us only a short while before her death a little poem which, because of its sheer beauty and courageous philosophy, we promptly admired. It proves now to have been almost prophetic. And we print it in this issue.

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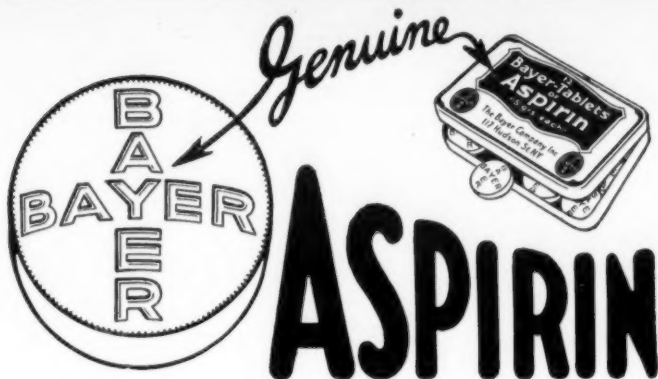
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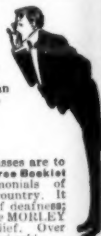
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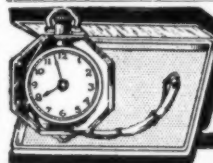
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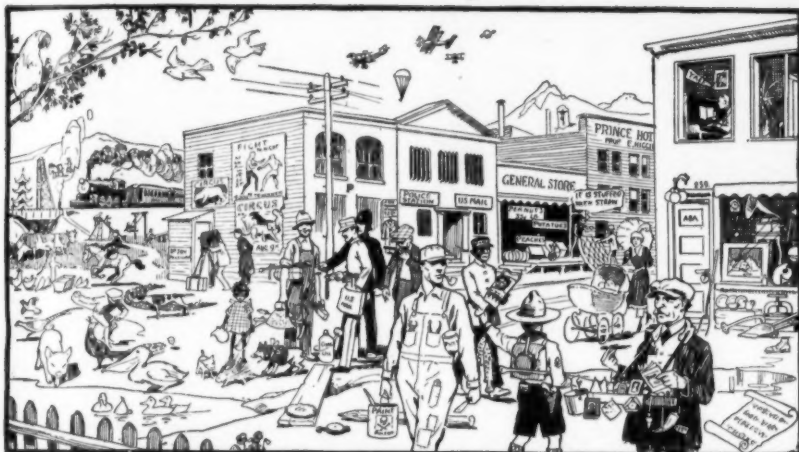
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It costs nothing to try. In this picture you will find a number of objects and parts of objects whose names begin with

Follow These Simple Easy Rules

1. Any man, woman, boy or girl living in the U. S. but residing outside of Batavia, Ill., who is not an employee of the Household Journal, or a member of the employee's family, may submit an answer. It costs nothing to try.
2. All answers must be mailed by May 30, 1925.
3. Answers should be written on one side of the paper only and words numbered consecutively 1, 2, 3, etc.
4. Write your full name and address on each page in the upper left-hand corner. Do not write subscribers' names or anything else on same paper with list of words.
5. Only words found in the English dictionary will be counted. Do not use compound, hyphenated or obsolete words. Use either the singular or plural, but where the plural is used the singular cannot be counted, and vice versa.
6. Words of the same spelling can be used only once, even though used to designate different objects. The same object can be named only once; however, any part of the object may also be named.
7. The answer having the largest and nearest correct list of words of visible objects shown in the picture that begin with the letter "P" will be awarded First Prize, etc. Neatness, style or handwriting have no bearing upon deciding the winners.
8. Candidates may co-operate in answering the puzzle, but only one prize will be awarded to any one household, nor will prizes be awarded to more than one of any group outside of the family where two or more have been working together.
9. All answers will receive the same consideration regardless of whether or not subscribers for the Household Journal are sent in.
10. Three prominent business men, having no connection with the Household Journal, will be selected to act as judges and decide the winners, and participants agree to accept the decision of the judges as final and conclusive.
11. The judges will meet and select the following close of the contest and announcement of winners and correct list of words will be published in the Household Journal as quickly thereafter as possible.

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the letter "P." Pick out the objects like "Pie," "Piano," etc. It's easier than it is. Of course it is. The other objects are just as easy to see but the idea is to see who can get the most. This is not a trick. You don't have to turn the picture up side down. Put down each word as you find it and watch your list grow.

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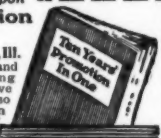
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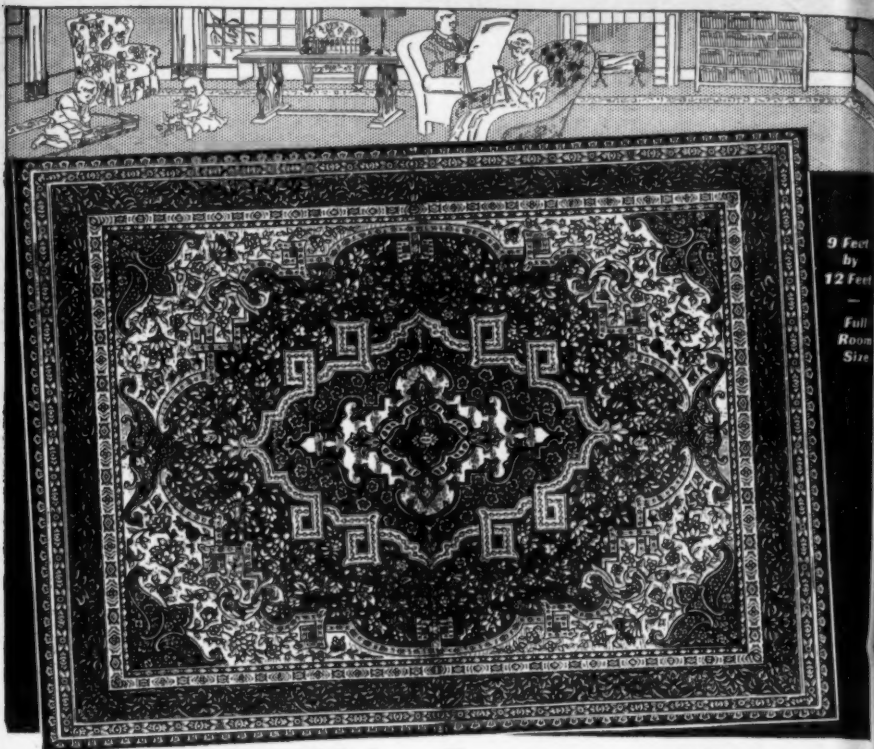
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